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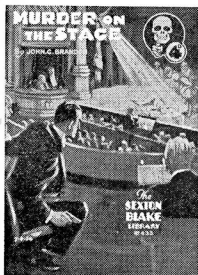


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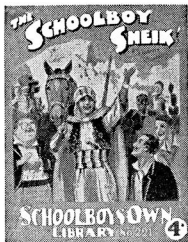
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THE SCHEMER OF ST. FRANK'S



By **EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.**

BLACKMAIL! *What would you have done in Travers' place? Forrest had him in a jam and things looked good for the cad of St. Frank's. There was a way out, however. Read how Travers found it!*

CHAPTER 1.

Trouble for Travers.

"**A**ND that," said Vivian Travers serenely, "is that!"

He had just cut a tricky ball to the boundary for a beautiful four, and the St. Frank's Junior XI claimed victory. This "away" game against Midshott had been noteworthy for two great innings, by Nipper—74—and Travers—69 not out. The mighty Oswald Handforth, for once, had scored a duck.

"Well done, Travers!" said Nipper, as he and the rest of the team were preparing to leave. "Your placing of

the field was first-class, and the tricky way you changed the bowlers was more than a bit responsible for our victory."

"In other words, dear old fellow, when it comes to captaining a cricket side, I'm a hot number," said Travers coolly. "Why tell me? Don't I know it? In most things I am of a modest and retiring disposition——"

"Ahem!" coughed Nipper.

"But in matters of cricket," pursued Travers, unmoved, "I'm apt to brag. I'm good, so why shouldn't I brag?"

The other St. Frank's juniors laughed. They knew their Travers. He was not really conceited, but he had an

unruffled, even exasperating, way of expressing himself—and he delighted, too, in the art of leg-pulling.

"Swelled head, old man—that's your trouble," said the burly Handforth, with a sniff. "You've been captain of junior cricket for a week—goodness knows why I wasn't given the job!—and you think you're a second Jardine."

"Jardine's good, too," admitted Travers.

"You—you howling ass!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" grinned Church. "Travers is only rotting."

"Well, it sounds like boasting to me," argued Handforth.

"Who cares?" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Travers' knock was the best we've seen this season—and he has a right to boast."

Travers listened to the discussion in that calm, urbane way of his. He had every reason to feel pleased with himself, for he had captained St. Frank's in two junior matches, and his brilliant leadership had resulted in two victories. He took cricket as he took everything else—with a serene, unruffled calm.

Dick Hamilton—otherwise known as Nipper—was the real junior skipper. But his guardian, the celebrated detective, Mr. Nelson Lee, was away from the school on an important forgery case, and it was possible that he would require Nipper's assistance.

Until the call came, Nipper was remaining at St. Frank's; but as he might have to leave at a moment's notice, upon receipt of a telegram, it was difficult for him to fulfil the duties of a cricket captain. So Vivian Travers, who had shown remarkably good form this season, was deputising. It was something of a novelty for Nipper to be freed of all responsibility, and he was thoroughly enjoying himself. There was a chance that the urgent call from Nelson Lee would never come, but while matters remained indefinite Nipper would stay on at St. Frank's, and Travers would hold the reins.

"Anybody coming pillion?" asked Travers, looking round. "Don't all speak at once. There's only room for one."

He had just donned his overalls, and beside him stood his gleaming high-power motor-cycle—a rakish-looking machine with low handlebars, glittering with chromium plate and brilliant red paintwork.

"Ahem! Thanks all the same, old man, but we're in no tearing hurry," said Jimmy Potts.

Riding pillion on Vivian Travers' machine was a hair-raising experience, and Potts was well placed to know, for he was Travers' study mate and bosom chum. The most surprising thing to Potts, and to many other fellows in the Remove, was that Travers was still alive. It was openly prophesied that he would come to a sticky finish.

For on a motor-cycle Travers was reckless. He gloried in being reckless. A rider of exceptional skill, he took chances which appeared sheerly suicidal. He was daring, his nerves were of steel, and he delighted in performing all manner of hair-raising stunts. Vivian Travers and his beloved motor-cycle were as inseparable as the celebrated Siamese Twins. To think of one without the other was simply not done. Wherever Travers went, his motor-bike went. It was a joke at St. Frank's that if Travers wanted to cross from the Ancient House to the Modern House, he would get out his famous "jigger."

"No takers?" he asked, in surprise. "Well, well! What's the matter with you all? Don't you like a thrill, once in a while?"

"That's just it, old man," said Nipper gently. "A thrill once in a while is attractive, but the fellow who rides pillion with you gets about sixteen thrills per minute, and after a time this becomes nerve-shattering. Remember, it's the chap in control who gets all the fun while his passenger hangs on, gritting his teeth, and praying for deliverance."

"Motorbikes ought to be prohibited by law," aid Handforth sternly.

As the proud owner of a car—a smart little Morris Minor saloon—he had definite opinions on the subject of motor-cycles. It was true that Nipper and Pit and one or two other juniors possessed motor-cycles, but they used them sensibly, and they never had any difficulty in finding pillion passengers. Travers, on the other hand, invariably rode solo—for obvious reasons.

"An' when it comes to speed," went on Handforth aggressively, "my car can wack any two-wheeled tank! I'll be home as soon as you, Travers!"

Church and McClure, who were to be Handforth's passengers, looked alarmed.

"Chase it, you ass," said Church hastily. "You're not challenging Travers to a race, are you?"

"Why not?"

"Why not!" yelled Church. "Do you want to kill yourself—and Mac and me as well? You know what a crazy speed maniac Travers is; and, in any case, your car can't hope to compete with Travers' racer."

It was an unfortunate remark, as Church realised almost before the words were out. Handforth bristled.

"Oh, can't it?" he retorted. "I'll show you! We'll start together, and if my Morris Minor can't lick that—"

"Hold on!" said Nipper uneasily. "Hasn't this got gone far enough? Travers, you're not going to be such an ass as to race with Handforth, are you?"

"Dear old fellow, it wouldn't be a race at all," replied Travers, shaking his head. "For a real race, you must have at least two competitors."

"Why, you silly lunatic—" began Handforth hotly.

"So you'd better potter along as usual, Handy," went on Travers, with an indulgent smile. "Racing on the public highway is a fool's game, anyhow."

With a nod he operated the kick-

starter, the powerful engine sprang into life, and the next moment Travers was off like a meteor.

"Hi, wait a minute!" roared Handforth.

"Let him go," said Nipper. "Be sensible, Handy. Why risk life and limb needlessly? Don't you realise that he was only pulling your leg?"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "He swanked about his cricket, and then he swanked about his silly motor-bike! I'm jolly well going to overtake him, just to show him where he gets off!"

The others grinned. Handforth's chances of overtaking Travers were very remote.

Travers himself, meanwhile, was on the main highway, shooting along at above fifty miles an hour, with the warm sunshine of the summer's evening slanting right into his eyes. He chuckled as he bent low over the rakish handlebars.

He guessed that Handforth would follow at top speed in the Morris Minor, and he made up his mind to get back to the old school in record time, and the instant he arrived he would get a responsible fellow to verify the exact time. Then, when Handforth turned up, he would be in a position to prove his oft-voiced contention that he and streak lightning were identical.

Travers gloried in speed—he revelled in the taking of chances. When there was no necessity for hurry he would nevertheless tear along at a breakneck rate, just for the sake of the thrill. In his defence it must be stated that he was an extraordinarily clever rider, with a cool brain in an emergency. His road sense was perfect, and his knack of anticipating danger had sometimes permitted him to beat disaster by a split second.

But to every worshipper of speed there comes a time when he tempts the fates once too often. There is some unknown, unsuspected factor which just overlaps the margin of safety. It was Vivian Travers' turn to-day.

There was one curve on this road

which always gave Travers an exceptional thrill. It was a really beautiful curve, for the hedges on either side of the road were low, enabling an approaching rider to clearly see any oncoming traffic. Moreover, the road itself was cambered, on the curve, in the new-fashioned and sensible way—almost like a modified race track.

Travers glowed inwardly as he approached. Not a vehicle was within sight—not a living soul. He took the curve at nearly fifty. And then things happened.

For no apparent reason his machine went into a terrific, uncontrollable skid. The thing was absurd, for the road surface was of non-skid concrete, and it was perfectly dry. But it happened, nevertheless.

There were no witnesses to see the schoolboy rider's masterly effort to regain control. He knew he was "for it," but he remained as cool as ice. With a terrifying screech, the back wheel went into the skid first, and, broadsiding like a track racer, Travers slewed madly across the road. Then his front wheel touched the concrete kerb, he shot into the road again, and wheel-wobble developed instantly. Utterly and completely out of control, the motor-cycle hurtled slantwise across the road, and then crashed head-on into a low brick wall.

Craaaaaaash!

Travers owed his life to the lowness of the wall, for at the moment of impact he was shot out of the saddle like a stone from a catapult. Over the wall he went, striking the comparatively soft ground beyond head first. He bounced like a rubber ball, arms and legs flying—over again, to fall finally face downwards, spreadeagled, senseless.

His machine had crumpled up like so much scrap iron, and a second after the screaming impact of steel and stone came the "whoosh" of a dull explosion. Flames leapt up, and black smoke rolled in billowing clouds towards the blue heavens.

Again it was the wall which saved Travers, for it intervened between him and the flames. He sprawled there unconscious, while his one-glorious machine went up in a tower of livid flames.

"What's that?" asked Church, in a startled voice.

"Only a bonfire, fathead," replied Handforth. "Don't bother! I've got her up to fifty, and—"

"It's not an ordinary bonfire" interrupted Church. "For goodness' sake, Handy go easy! There's a curve ahead."

"Don't I know it?" said Handforth. "But the road's clear, and the surface is cambered the right way. By George there is something rummy about that fire!"

Handforth & Co., in the faithful Morris Minor, were hard on the heels of Vivian Travers. Although, in ordinary circumstances, Handforth would never have had an earthly chance of overtaking the motorcyclist, he was actually only a minute behind Travers at this particular spot. Thus it came about that he and his crams were first on the scene of the disaster.

Church was sitting next to Handforth in front, and McClure was behind, with Jerry Dodd, the Australian junior, as an additional passenger.

Handforth could now see that the "bonfire" was actually on the roadside, just round the curve. He eased the foot-throttle and applied the brakes.

"Whoa!" he gasped.

For the little car, for some unaccountable reason, had gone into an alarming skid. However, its speed was not excessive, and Handforth soon regained control; but not until he had slithered drunkenly across to the off-side of the road.

"I say, that was funny!" he ejaculated. "The road's as dry as a bone!"

"Look!" panted McClure, horrified.

They were within ten yards of the roaring column of fire. Handforth and

Church opened the doors and tumbled out. McGuire and Dodd followed, and for some seconds they stood transfixed, staring at that grimly significant blaze.

"It's a motor-bike!" said Church hoarsely. "Travers' motor-bike! Oh, the reckless idiot! Nipper warned him—"

"But where's Travers?" broke in Handforth, with husky horror.

They all believed, in that dread moment, that Vivian Travers, beyond all human aid, was concealed in the smother of smoke and flame. There was nothing they could do. To even approach the fire was impossible, for the heat was deadly. The petrol from the burst tank had spread over a considerable area, and the twisted, blackened remains of the motor-cycle could be dimly seen in the centre of the inferno.

"He's not there!" burst out Jerry Dodd suddenly. "There's only the motor-bike—". He broke off and made a dash for the wall. One look he took, and then he turned a flushed face, eloquent of relief, to the others. "Quick, you fellows!" he panted. "He's over here—in the field!"

"What!"

They dashed at the wall, leaping it in their stride. A moment later they were bending over the unconscious Travers, intensely relieved, but still fearful.

"He's not dead, anyhow," said Handforth, after a moment. "No bones broken, either, by the feel of it. He's breathing regularly—"

"There's blood here," said Church significantly.

He had pulled back Travers' headgear, and it was obvious at once that the unconscious schoolboy was suffering from a head injury, the seriousness of which could not be determined.

"There's only one thing to do," said Handforth crisply. "We've got to rush him to hospital. Help me to carry him to the car, you chaps. Easy, now—lift him gently."

"He must have skidded the same as

we did—only a lot worse," said Church. "Then he hit the wall head-on, and was thrown clean over. By Jove! That was lucky for him. If he hadn't gone over the wall, he'd have been burnt to a cinder!"

"Why talk about it?" growled Handforth. "Can't you shut up, ass?"

They carried the unconscious junior over the wall, and Church noticed, as they went across the road, that his shoes gritted strangely.

"Sand!" he ejaculated, staring down. "Look! Loose sand on the road. That's why he skidded."

Church was right. Here was the unsuspected factor which had caused the accident. Travers had taken that curve on the way to the match with perfect safety, and there had been nothing to show him that the road surface was any different on the way back. But during the afternoon a builder's lorry, laden with sand, had passed that way. The lorry-driver had been forced to brake suddenly on approaching the curve, and the jerk had slightly displaced the tail-board. Dry sand had trickled over the road on the curve, like water from a water-cart, spreading it evenly and invisibly over the concrete surface. Hence that disastrous dry skid of Travers'—and a dry skid is always dangerous, for one is unprepared for it.

Handforth and his chums, however, gave no further thought to the sand, or the road. They only knew that Vivian Travers was in need of medical assistance.

The unconscious Removite was gently placed in the front seat. Church and McClure and Dodd squeezed themselves into the rear section of the little car, and Church, leaning over, supported Travers. Handforth leapt into the driving-seat, and a moment later the little car was away.

Within twenty minutes Bannington was reached, and Vivian Travers was delivered at the Cottage Hospital. Fate had played him a strange trick, for it was from that moment that his real troubles began.

CHAPTER 2.

The Chopper.

"NOTHING to worry about," said the house-surgeon, with a smile. "Slight concussion and a few bruises—that's all. He has recovered consciousness already."

Handforth & Co., who had been anxiously waiting, were relieved.

"We thought he was badly smashed up," said Handforth.

"He'll be back at school with you to-morrow," promised the doctor. "I think I had better detain him here until then—just a matter of precaution."

"Well, thank goodness for that," said Church. "Can we go in and see him?"

"I think perhaps you'd better," replied the house-surgeon dryly. "He's asking anxiously about his motor-cycle. How did the accident happen, by the way?"

They told him.

"He's a remarkably lucky young man," commented the doctor. "He might easily have been killed."

The juniors were taken to a private ward, and there they found Vivian Travers sitting up in bed, and looking very sorry for himself, with a big patch of surgical plaster on the left side of his head. He was pale and evidently in some pain, for his face was pinched and drawn.

"Well, you made a nice mess of things!" was his surprising greeting.

They gathered round the bed and stared at him.

"You're not yourself, old man——" began Handforth.

"Yes, I am!" interrupted Travers. "I'm so much myself that there was no need to bring me to hospital. It's plain rot to keep me here."

"The doctor says you'll be out to-morrow," said Church encouragingly.

"To-morrow!" repeated Travers. "That's a fat lot of good! Don't you realise that the Head will hear about it? And it's any odds that the Head will write to my pater. I'm fairly and squarely in the soup!"

"Well, there's gratitude!" said Handforth indignantly. "We find you lying unconscious, and we don't know how seriously you're hurt, and we bring you to hospital——"

"Sorry, dear old fellow; perhaps I did sound ungrateful," broke in Travers. "Forget it. You didn't know it was so trivial, did you? Is my jigger badly damaged?" he asked anxiously.

Handforth coughed.

"To tell you the truth, old man, there's no jigger left," he said gently.

"Draw it mild!" protested the patient. "I know I hit the wall—awful wallop, and I remember flying over it, but my bike can't be such a wreck as all that. I dare say the front part is busted up——"

"Of course, you didn't know about the fire?" asked Handforth.

"Fire?" ejaculated Travers, with jump.

They broke it to him as gently as possible; and then, indeed, Travers realised how narrowly he had escaped a terrible death. He realised, too, that his fine motor-cycle was nothing but a heap of twisted and distorted wreckage.

When Handforth drove his Morris Minor into the Triangle of St. Frank's some little time later, a prefect was waiting.

"The Head wants to see you four young sweeps at once," said the prefect grimly. "What have you been up to this time?"

"For once you're wrong, Biggy," replied Handforth. "The Head probably wants to shake hands all round with us and give us a whole holiday."

"Well, I hope you're right," said Biggleswade, the prefect. "But it looks uncommonly like trouble to me. The Head doesn't send for kids like you unless he means to give 'em a tanning."

He escorted the four Removees through Big Arch, then across Inner Court, to the Headmaster's House. Mr. James Kingswood himself was waiting

in his study, and he was looking unusually grave as the juniors were ushered in.

St. Frank's was very proud of its youthful, athletic Head—affectionately called by all in the school "Fighting Jim." Whenever the newspapers had occasion to mention Mr. Kingswood in their columns they always referred to him as "The Fighting Headmaster." For Mr. Kingswood's scholastic reputation was easily eclipsed by his fame as a boxer. He was a tall, finely-built man, clean-shaven, and a somewhat aggressive cast of countenance.

"I wanted to speak to you fellows because I understand that Travers had an accident this evening," he said, coming straight to the point in his usual direct way. "You found him on the road, I believe, and rendered first-aid?"

"Well, it wasn't much, sir," said Handforth, with exaggerated carelessness. "Just an ordinary kind of spill. Travers isn't hurt."

"Indeed?" said the Head. "Surely you are mistaken, Handforth? Dr. Thomson, of the Bannington Cottage Hospital, told me over the telephone, not five minutes ago, that Travers was carried in unconscious."

"That's nothing, sir," said Handforth. "Just a little knock. He's all right now. I've sometimes made a chap unconscious with one biff of the fist—and, if it comes to that, sir, so have you."

"I understand that Travers had a very nasty crash on the way home from Midshott," continued Mr. Kingswood relentlessly. "He took a corner at excessive speed, charged headlong into a stone wall, and his machine caught fire. Am I right?"

"Well, in a way, sir——"

"Am I right?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Handforth reluctantly. "If the wall hadn't been low, and if Travers hadn't pitched over it, he would have been burnt to death. I mean, being unconscious, he couldn't have saved himself— Eh? What's the idea of treading on my foot, Church, you ass?"

Church turned red, gulped, and tried to look innocent.

"Thank you, Handforth—that's all I wanted to know," said the Head quietly. "It is quite apparent that Travers was driving his motor-cycle with hare-brained recklessness. And, as you say, he is lucky to be alive."

"Hold on, sir!" burst out Handforth. "You can't blame Travers. There was a lot of loose sand on the road just at that curve. Why, even my Morris Minor skidded like the dickens. The sand was invisible——"

"But you didn't crash, did you, Handforth?" asked the Head. "If Travers had been riding at a reasonable speed he would have been able to correct the skid. Isn't that perfectly obvious?" He smiled. "I want to compliment you fellows for the prompt measures you took, and to thank you, too, for behaving so sensibly. Well done!"

"We did nothing that deserves thanks, sir," said Handforth uncomfortably. "Dash it, we'd have done just the same for a tramp if we had found him unconscious on the road."

"Will Travers get into trouble, sir?" asked Jerry Dodd.

"Well, I'm afraid he will," replied the Head, becoming grave.

"Then it's our fault," protested Handforth. "I say, sir, that's not fair! Why should Travers get it in the neck? If we hadn't taken him to hospital you would have known nothing about it."

"But you did take him to hospital—and Dr. Thomson considered it his duty to report to me," replied the Head. "In any case, Handforth, are you not assuming when you suggest that I should not have heard of the accident? Do you think that I go about St. Frank's blindfolded and with muffled ears? Sooner or later I should certainly have known of Travers' accident, so your action in taking him to hospital makes absolutely no difference to the outcome."

Comforted by that knowledge, the four Removites took their departure, and when they got into the Triangle

they found a considerable crowd awaiting them. Excitement was running high. The other cricketers had returned, too, and rumours were flying about all over the school.

"Here he is! Here's Handy!"

Handforth & Co. and Jerry Dodd found themselves surrounded. Some juniors had already examined the Morris Minor, and one or two drops of fresh blood on the upholstery had given rise to the most sanguinary stories.

"Tell us all about it, Handy!"

"Was Travers dead when you found him?"

"Were all his bones broken?"

"Did you have to drag him out of the fire?"

"You bloodthirsty rotters!" roared Handforth, glaring. "Who told you that Travers was dead?"

"Isn't he dead?" demanded Owen major.

"Of course he's dead," said Teddy Long excitedly. "I heard it from Chalmers of the Fifth. Handy's trying to break it gently, that's all."

"Well, I hate to disappoint you all," said Handforth heavily, "but it happens that Travers is still alive."

"He wasn't killed, then?" asked Hubbard. "You took him to hospital, didn't you? How long do you think he'll linger?"

"Well, if he doesn't have any more accidents, and if he doesn't get any fatal diseases, he ought to linger about sixty-five or seventy years," replied Handforth sarcastically.

His audience was shocked.

"Cheese it, Handy, old man," protested Harry Gresham. "It's hardly the thing to joke about a chap who's lying in hospital dying."

"He's not dying!" roared Handforth.

"But he can't live long with two fractured legs and with all his ribs smashed in."

"His legs aren't broken, and his ribs aren't smashed in."

"What about his fractured skull?"

"You—you burbling lunatics!" yelled

Handforth. "Travers' skull is as sound as mine——"

"That's not saying much," interrupted Singleton.

"He's hardly injured at all," bellowed Handforth. "Just a scalp wound—that's all. He'll be back here to-morrow. Can't you fatheads understand that he's hardly hurt?"

It is only fair to say that most of the fellows were greatly relieved to hear the truth; yet, at the same time, certain minority undoubtedly looked disappointed. Here was a first-class sensation, and Handforth, like a chump, had to come along and spoil everything!

"How do you feel, Travers?"

"Fine, sir, thanks!"

Vivian Travers, looking as fit as ever, had just been ushered into the Head's study. It was the next morning, and the school had already started lessons. Travers, discharged from the hospital, had come over by bus.

"I'm glad to see you looking so well," said Mr. Kingswood.

"It was all tommy-rot to keep me in hospital, sir," complained Travers. "I'm as fit as ever. One or two bruises and a crack on the head—but I'm not soft. I don't mind a hard knock or two about the accident, sir——"

"I've seen your machine, Travers—or what there is left of it," said the Head quietly. "It was brought in this morning—on a lorry. Allowing for the distortion caused by the heat of the fire, it is nevertheless apparent that the entire front of the motor-cycle was smashed in by the force of the impact. In other words, Travers, you hit that wall with terrific force."

"Well, you see, sir, I skidded——"

"You must have been going round that curve at a highly dangerous speed," continued the Head. "Now Travers, I have had occasion to warn you many times against reckless riding. You have no defence, and you know it. You were speeding at the time of this

accident—speeding with a recklessness which tells of a total disregard for your own safety and the safety of other users of the road."

"But there weren't any other users of the road, sir."

"Happily, no," agreed Mr. Kingswood. "But supposing there had been, Travers? How you escaped death is well-nigh inexplicable. Perhaps it was your very speed which saved you."

"Then it's just as well I was going so fast, sir."

"Oh, no! That argument is quite unsound," said the headmaster. "Nine motor-cycle deaths out of ten are caused by excessive speed. And it is not always the rider of the motor-cycle who is killed."

"I've never hit anybody, sir," protested Travers. "I'll admit I'm a bit of a speed merchant, but I don't take unnecessary chances."

"You took one yesterday, or your machine would not now be a wreck," said Fighting Jim. "However, I'm not going to lecture you, Travers. I fancy somebody else will do that. Look at this."

He picked up a telegram from his desk, and Travers' heart sank.

"Is that from my pater, sir?" he asked gloomily.

"It is."

"It's a pity you told him anything about it—"

"What did you expect me to do?" broke in the Head sharply. "I hear that you are in hospital, suffering from concussion; I learn that your motor-cycle is utterly wrecked. Naturally, I wrote to your father last night giving him the facts. This is his reply."

Travers took the telegram. It was brief and to the point:

"Coming down at once.—TRAVERS."

"For the love of Samson!" muttered Travers in dismay.

"I will say no more until your father arrives," said the Head, rising. "You will be excused lessons this morning,

Travers, and you may occupy yourself as you please."

"But I don't want to be excused lessons, sir," objected Travers. "I'm not an invalid—there's nothing wrong with me. I'd much rather go into school, as usual."

"Very well," said Mr. Kingswood. "If your father wants you immediately he arrives I will send for you."

Travers, usually so debonair, wore a gloomy frown as he walked towards the School House. He walked with a slight limp, for his right leg was black and blue with bruises—and they were a great deal more painful than he would have admitted.

"The chopper!" he muttered dismally. "The pater might even jib at buying me another motor-bike!" The very thought appalled him. "That'll mean I shall have to borrow Reggie Pitt's jigger, or Nipper's, or Singleton's. Nipper's is a good bus, but the others aren't much class."

He cheered up when he remembered that Nipper was probably going away, and Nipper might leave his motor-bike behind. In that case, even if his father went the limit, things might not be so bad.

"It's no good crossing the bally bridge before I come to it, anyway," he decided philosophically. "I dare say the pater will be so glad to see me in one whole piece that he'll let me give the order for a new jigger."

He strolled into the Remove classroom with all his old sang-froid, and there was an immediate chorus of welcome.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell, looking up with a cold eye. "What is the meaning of this disturbance? Really, I cannot allow— Oh, I see! It's you, Travers."

"Sorry I'm late, sir," said Travers as he went to his desk. "Not my fault, really; I wanted to come earlier, but the doctor wouldn't listen."

"I am glad to see you so well, Travers," said the Form-master. "I

had expected you to be much more—er—decorated. Yesterday we heard some very alarming rumours."

"Good old Travers!"

"Glad to have you back, old man!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Lucky thing you weren't killed."

"Silence, please," said Mr. Crowell. "Really, I cannot allow this interruption of work. If you are feeling well enough to attend your studies, Travers, all well and good."

"Everybody seems to think I'm crooked up, sir," grumbled Travers. "All because Handy took me to hospital—instead of ducking my head in the nearest stream!"

Mr. Robert Travers arrived some little time after the morning interval, when the school was hard at work. He was looking anxious and troubled at first; but, after a talk with Mr. Kingswood, he was reassured. But a grim expression had now come into his strong, soldierly face.

"It's intolerable," he said, squaring his jaw. "I have allowed that boy of mine a great deal of rope, Mr. Kingswood; he has promised me again and again that he would not abuse my generosity—that he would not indulge in reckless speeding. I can see I've been too lax with him."

"In defence of your son, I must say that he is an extraordinarily good rider," said Mr. Kingswood. "I think there must have been some special reason for this unfortunate accident."

"You mean the condition of the road surface?" asked Mr. Travers, pursing his lips. "That's no excuse, Mr. Kingswood. If my son had been travelling at a reasonable speed he could not have had such a narrow escape."

They went to see the wreckage, which had been placed in the garage behind the school. One look at that twisted, battered scrap iron was enough.

"Don't you see?" asked Mr. Travers, pointing. "Look how the front wheel and the forks are driven right back

into the rest of the machine. He must have hit the wall at about sixty miles an hour. By Heaven! It's a miracle that he still lives—and I am thankful, indeed, that he came out virtually unscathed."

"When one looks at this machine one is baffled by the mystery of his escape," agreed the headmaster. "What steps do you intend to take with your son?"

"May I see him?" asked Mr. Travers with sudden briskness. "May I see him now—at once—here?"

"If you will wait I will send him to you," promised the Head.

Vivian Travers came within five minutes, and he took good care not to limp as he approached the stern figure of his father. Indeed, with his school cap on his head there was no trace of his accident.

"Sorry you had to come down, pater," he said diffidently. "There wasn't any real need——"

"So you're not hurt, son?" interrupted his father, taking him by the shoulders and looking earnestly into his face. "Thank Heaven I can look upon you as I do—with whole limbs and unshattered body. It might easily have been—very different."

"Yes, pater," said Travers, impressed by his father's seriousness.

"I wonder if you realise the utter folly of riding a motor-cycle at mad speeds?" went on Mr. Travers. "Have you no thought for me, Vivian—or for your mother? How do you think we should feel if we were called here to find you smashed up—perhaps maimed for life?"

"But, pater, nothing like that has happened," protested Travers.

"But it might have happened—and you know as well as I do that your escape was a hair's breadth one," continued Mr. Travers.

His manner suddenly became stern.

"Well, Vivian, there'll be no more of it," he said grimly. "I have warned you before, but I am not going to warn you again. This is the finish."

"You don't mean that you won't buy me another machine, pater?"

"I mean more than that," said Mr. Travers in that same inflexible tone. "I forbid you ever to ride another motor-cycle, no matter what the circumstances."

"But, pater, it's the greatest sport on earth," exclaimed Travers desperately. "I love it better than cricket—better than football. Motor-cycling is my great hobby—"

"So it may have been in the past," said his father. "In the future you must find another hobby. Your motor-cycling days are over, Vivian. I mean it, and if you have any thoughts of pleasing me, you may save your breath."

Travers was startled. He knew his father to be good-natured, tolerant, broad-minded. But never had Travers seen his father as he saw him now. Never had his father been so granite-like.

"You don't mean it, pater—you can't mean it," urged Travers, throwing aside his air of sophisticated worldliness and clutching at his father's arm. "Just because of one accident—"

"One!" broke in Mr. Travers sharply. "Your memory is very imperfect."

"Well, I'll admit I've had a spill or two in the past, and you've bought me two or three machines," said Travers. "But this affair yesterday was only a simple accident."

"It was an accident brought about on a perfectly clear road solely because of your insane craving for speed," said Mr. Travers sternly. "Mercifully, you were spared. But it is the end. You will get no other motor-cycle, Vivian. And you must give me your word of honour that you will not ride on any borrowed machine—"

"Hold on, pater," interrupted Travers, an obstinate expression coming into his face. "Is that quite playing the game? I'm not going to give you my word like that."

"It doesn't matter," said his father. "I'm not asking anything of you, Vivian. I'm telling you. If you ride as much as half-a-mile on any borrowed machine, and that fact comes to my ears, I will take you away from St. Frank's on that very same day."

"You don't mean it, pater," ejaculated Travers, aghast.

"I mean it with absolute sincerity," said Mr. Travers. "Once and for all, there shall be an end to your speed madness, my boy. I am threatening you with drastic punishment because I know how reckless you are—how self-willed and independent. That will of yours has sometimes broken through my barriers of authority, and I have good-naturedly given way. But this time, Vivian, I intend to be the master. Understand that, and let it sink right in."

"You'd take me away from St. Frank's!" muttered Travers, shaken to the core.

"Disobey me and your school career ends," said his father. "Yes, and your Varsity career will never even commence. On the day I hear that you have ridden another motor-cycle—even if only at a walking pace—I will take you straight away from this school and put you into my City office."

"But—but you can't mean it, pater," protested Travers. "You're just saying this to scare me—"

"I am saying it because I intend you to know how deeply I feel on the subject," said Mr. Travers earnestly. "Disobey me, Vivian, and you not only sacrifice your school career, but you lose your chance of going up to the Varsity. That's all!"

Travers was frantic.

"But if I promise never to speed again, pater!" he exclaimed tensely. "If I pledge my word that I'll never take any more chances—"

"It is useless," broke in Mr. Travers, almost harshly. "I don't doubt you, Vivian. For some time you would respect your promise; then, one day,

you would be in a great hurry, or you would be tempted by that demon engine of speed beneath you. No, no! There can be no half measures. You shall not throw your life away—as you nearly threw it away yesterday. I meant every word I said, and the subject is closed."

Vivian Travers was silent. There was something in his father's tone which told him plainly enough that it would be folly to argue.

The chopper had come down with a vengeance.

CHAPTER 3.

Travers Takes the Bus.

"YOU were wise, Mr. Travers, if you will permit me to say so," said the headmaster a little later. "Your son is an exceptional boy, calm, clever, outstanding amongst his fellows. With such a boy you must be rocklike in your firmness."

"I think I have cured him," said Mr. Travers, with satisfaction. "At all events, he can be under no misapprehension regarding his punishment if he disobeys me. I mean it, Mr. Kingswood—every word. I know my son, and because I know him I was compelled to be ruthlessly drastic."

He saw Vivian again before leaving; and now his manner was kindly, genial. He gave his son two crisp fivers, and patted him encouragingly on the shoulder.

"Don't feel hardly, son," he said. "I want you to grow up to be a fine man; I'm interested in your career, in everything you do. You'll find another hobby, I'm sure. There's plenty of cricket at this time of the year, and plenty of sports on the river—that's an idea," he added with a smile. "I won't be so harsh as to debar you from having anything to do with motors. I'll buy you a little motor-launch—"

"Awfully decent of you, pater, but you'd only waste your money," said Travers, with a sigh. "A motor-launch on the river would be too frightfully

tame." He brightened. "But what about an outboard speedboat?" he added cheerfully.

"Upon my soul!"

"No good on the river, of course," went on Travers eagerly. "But I can keep it at Caistowe. There's ripping sport to be got—"

"Enough," interrupted Mr. Travers, with a helpless gesture. "Having been barred from the roads, you now seek to gratify your speed mania on the water! No, no, Vivian, I won't hear of it. You'll be asking me for an aeroplane next."

"It's not a bad idea, at that," said Travers promptly.

"You're incorrigible, Vivian," said Mr. Travers. "Remember, this ban of have imposed upon you includes speed-boats and aeroplanes. Good heavens, boy, your craze for speed is appalling. I can see that I must include motor-cars, too. Do you understand?"

"It's a pity I spoke, pater," sighed Travers.

"No; it is a very good thing," retorted his father. "I forbid you to ride in any vehicle, of any description whatsoever, which comes within the speed class."

"In that case, I shall have to walk home at the end of term," said Travers. "Railway trains do sixty miles an hour, you know."

"You may ride in railway trains with impunity," said Mr. Travers, with a sudden laugh. "I'm glad that your sense of humour is not affected by my sternness, Vivian. It is, of course, driving at speed that I forbid. What I have decided is entirely for your own good—and, I may add, for the peace of mind of your mother and myself. Do you realise that for months past, when a telegram has been delivered at home, your mother has immediately jumped to the conclusion that you have met with a serious accident on your motor-cycle? It's not right that you should cause her such anxiety; and now it has

ceased. Bear in mind what will happen to you if——"

"Don't say it again, pater—I know it by heart," groaned Vivian Travers.

After his father had gone, his school-fellows found him as urbane and self-possessed as ever.

"The chopper, my dear fellows, has descended with a dull, sickening thud," he said with a shake of his head. "My motor-cycling days are over. I hope there'll be no objections if I go into mourning for a week?"

He made no secret of what had passed between his father and himself. Handforth & Co., Nipper, Tregellis-West, it, Colenborne, Reggie Pitt and pleaded her round in a sympathetic breath. Travers told them of the dire consequences if he dared to disobey the parental ban.

"Do you think he really meant it?" asked Handforth doubtfully.

"It's a point, old man, I would hardly like to put to the test," replied Travers. "He's got me—and he knows it. Do you think I'm going to risk my career? No, and I've got to hand it to the pater that he has put it over big. I'm quite certain that he does mean it; and even if I wasn't certain, I'd be a fool to take a chance. Nipper, and all you other chaps with motor-bikes—be sporty, please, and never come near me with your jiggers. From now onwards I think I'll go in for a bath chair."

"It's all very well to rot about it," said Jimmy Potts, who shared Study H, in the Ancient House, with Travers. "But, if you ask me, you're lucky that you're not in a bath-chair at this very minute. You know, Travers, you were a bit of a speed devil. You've been asking for this particular brand of trouble for a long time."

Travers did not get much sympathy, for most of the juniors were inclined to smile when the story got about. Travers had got it in the neck, and he had nobody to blame but himself.

Within a day or two, however, the incident was completely forgotten.

Travers himself had dispensed with the surgical plaster, and his bruised leg troubled him no more. Outwardly, he was the same genial fellow as of yore.

He devoted himself enthusiastically to cricket. There was to be an important match on Saturday—St. Frank's Junior XI versus the River House School. On the Friday morning the team had not been made public; but Travers was known to be making his selection. Bernard Forrest of Study A presented himself before the junior captain.

"What about me, Travers?" he asked with unwonted cordiality.

Travers, who was writing, looked up from the table.

"Shut the door, old fellow—there's a draught," he said. "And while you're about it, shut it from the other side."

"Now, don't rot," said Forrest. "You know what I mean. When are you going to put me in the eleven?"

Travers sat back in his chair and eyed the cad of the Remove with thoughtful placidity.

"This is becoming tiresome," he observed. "How many times have you asked me that question, Forrest? What makes you think that I'll put you in the eleven?"

"I'm playing good cricket, aren't I?" retorted Forrest. "That's a reason—and a good one."

"I don't like you, Forrest, and you don't like me," said Travers. "But we needn't bring our personal feelings into this question. It is the duty of a cricket skipper to select his soundest men. Agreed? All right, then. I'd select you like a shot, but I'm not satisfied that you're sound."

Bernard Forrest flushed. He was a fellow who thought a very great deal of himself; he was dandified and superior; he and his two chums, Gulliver and Bell, firmly believed themselves to be a cut above the rest of the Removites. The rest of the Removites believed Forrest and Gulliver and Bell to be beneath contempt. Just a matter of opinion.

"What do you mean—I'm not sound?" demanded Forrest truculently.

"You smoke."

"Don't be an idiot! You smoke, too!"

"We're not discussing my bad habits," said Travers coolly. "Still, while we're on the subject, I'd like to mention that I haven't smoked since I took over the junior cricket captaincy. Cricket and smoking don't mix, Forrest. To be in the best form for cricket, a fellow has to cut out his little vices."

"What's this—a lecture?" sneered Bernard Forrest. "My wind is as sound as yours—and you know it. I've been putting in a lot of practice at the nets, and I'm batting well."

"Agreed," said Travers. "I've watched you, and I think the practice has done you good. It's possible I might find you a place in a House match, but I'm not going to take the risk of putting you in a school side."

"Risk? What the deuce do you mean?"

"I'm going to be quite frank," replied Vivian Travers. "I couldn't trust you, Forrest. You bat well, and you're pretty slippery in the field. But you're the owner of a particularly vindictive temper; and although cricket is supposed to be the cleanest game under the sun, certain things sometimes happen in a match which fray a fellow's temper. A good sportsman will control himself. He'll keep smiling, and he'll carry on. The whole point of this is that you're not a good sportsman—and that keeps you definitely out of the side. I couldn't trust you."

Forrest was getting hotter and hotter.

"You confounded, stuck-up fool!" he said loudly. "If you think you can sit there and abuse me——"

"The abuse appears to be all on one side," interrupted Travers. "I have merely told you the truth. Your voice annoys me, Forrest. Kindly pass out to your right."

"You—you—you——"

"Must I use force?" asked Travers

with a sigh, as he rose to his feet. "Can't we settle these things like gentlemen? No, I suppose not. You don't know what a gentleman is, do you?"

Forrest went away, seething. It was not the first time that Travers had turned him down in this fashion. And it is only fair to Forrest to say that he was really in earnest this season—he badly wanted to get into the team. He had been practising diligently, earnestly, with that object.

Left alone, Travers threw his mask aside. He sat back in his chair, and his thoughts wandered away from the game. Once again he felt himself in the arms of his beloved—and now he had a motor-cycle. He felt the wind past his ears as he bent low over the handlebars.

"What I wouldn't give for one ride," he muttered bitterly. "Just one ride! By Samson! It's true enough that a fellow doesn't realise the worth of a thing until he has lost it!"

Everybody in the Remove was under the impression that Travers had philosophically resigned himself to the new order of things. But Travers was not the kind of fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve. He was a past master in the art of concealing his emotions. He pined in private for his lost sport, and nobody, not even his own study mate, had the faintest idea of how hard he had been hit.

It seemed that fate deliberately set out to mock him; for Saturday turned out to be a soaking wet day, and the River House match was necessarily off. A friend of Travers', named Forsyth, who was in the Fifth Form at Helmford College, rang Travers up and suggested that he should come over for the afternoon.

"It'll suit me," said Travers. "There'll be no cricket in this soaker."

"I know you don't take any notice of rain," said Forsyth. "You're one of the all-weather motor-cyclists, aren't you?"

"If I had the chance," said Travers, "I'd motor-cycle to-day in a snowstorm with a pea-soup fog thrown in for luck."

"What are you getting at?" asked the Helmford senior. "Is your jigger out of commission?"

"I'll tell you when I see you," replied Travers sadly.

He was rather glad to get away—and he went over to Helmford by bus. That journey seemed interminable; he chafed at every stop, and even when the bus was making good speed, it seemed a mere snail's crawl to him. He had often done the twenty miles to Helmford in just under the half-hour—Archie considered that moderate going, others took an hour and a quarter.

"crowd will have a crash, one of these days going at such speed," said Travers to the conductor, as he got off.

"Oh, it's safe enough, sonny," said the conductor, taking the remark quite seriously. "Our drivers are first-class—What's that?"

But the sound which Travers had made was inarticulate. He trudged through the rain to the college buildings, trying to conquer the depression which had settled over him like a black cloud.

Forsyth noticed no difference in Travers' demeanour when they met; and Travers found it very comfortable and cosy in his friend's study. Forsyth was a cheery, jocular fellow, and he was quite mad on the subject of cricket.

"I expected you sooner, old man," he said. "What's the idea of coming in this rig? Where's your motor-bike?"

"Gone, but not forgotten," replied Travers tragically. "Listen, little one, and I will tell you a sad, sad story."

But he told it so smilingly, and with such a wealth of witty comment, that Forsyth had no idea of the heartache behind it all.

"Jolly hard lines, old son," said the Helmford man, at last. "Your pater certainly came down with a thud. Any chance of him changing his mind?"

"Knowing my pater as I do, I should

say the chances are nil," said Travers. "Still, one must live and hope. What would life be without hope?"

"You're a bit of a hero, you know," said Forsyth admiringly.

"Meaning?"

"Well, you came all this way to see me—and you came by bus!"

Travers winced.

"Shall we talk of cricket?" he suggested mildly.

"I was going to show you a new motor-bike one of our fellows got," said Forsyth, with an utter lack of tact. "It's a spanker—oodles of horse-power, overhead valves, and it makes a wicked, roaring hum—"

"Shall we talk of cricket?" insisted Travers. "What do you think of England's chances in the Test Match next week? There's no doubt these Australians are hot numbers. Do you think Bradman will score a couple of hundred off his own bat—or a mere, paltry century?"

"I get you," grinned Forsyth. "Sorry I mentioned that motor-bike! Rather touched you on the raw, eh? I was talking about Larwood the other day with a chap. He reckons that leg theory, or body line, is all tosh. But I said—"

They were soon deeply immersed in the all-engrossing subject of cricket, and Vivian Travers enjoyed himself. At about tea-time there was a break in the clouds, and the rain ceased. In fact, the sky cleared very nicely, and a watery sun shed its golden rays down on a watery world.

"Clearing up, now that it's too late for cricket," said Forsyth, looking out of the window. "I say, I'd like you to come out and look at our pitch."

"What for?" said Travers. "There's only one really good pitch in this county. If you want to see the big brother of a billiard-table, come along to St. Frank's—"

"My poor fellow," interrupted Forsyth, "your pitch at St. Frank's is a ploughed field compared with ours!"

"Oh, well, let's not argue," said Travers good-humouredly.

They went forth to the playing-fields, and they found that a few other Helmford fellows had come out, and were standing round, gazing owl-like at the pitch with awe and reverence.

"Mustn't walk on it," said Forsyth warningly.

"I believe you," nodded Travers. "Almost like a quagmire, isn't it?"

"You funny dummy!" snorted Forsyth. "I was just going to say that it looked like a stretch of green velvet. By Jove! Look at that grass! Look how gloriously level it is!"

"That imagination of yours, old man, is a gift," said Travers enviously. "You haven't seen our pitch at St. Frank's lately, have you? Well, well! If ever you want a treat—Hallo! Isn't that a worm coming up for air? Better sound the riot call! It's a pity there are so many mole-hills, isn't it?"

"Mole-hills!" shouted Forsyth. "Why, you ass, there's not a blemish! Trying to pull my leg, eh? You're jealous, my lad!"

Travers grinned.

"What about tea?" he suggested.

They went indoors again, and Forsyth provided such a handsome tea that Travers became really cheerful.

"What time do you have to go back?" asked Forsyth when they had reached the cream-bun stage.

"Oh, I got a late pass," replied Travers. "Had to. When I looked up the bus time-table, I found there was nothing between five-fifteen and seven-forty-five. The five-fifteen's too early, and the seven-forty-five doesn't crawl into Bellon until nearly nine. Still, Old Wilkey was decent about it, and I got the pass."

Unfortunately, just after six Forsyth was called away. He raved picturesquely.

"It's that blighting old dodderer, Transom," he said, in disgust. "He's the worst hound on two legs!"

"A murderer of some sort?" inquired Forsyth politely.

"No; my Form-master," grunted Forsyth.

"Very much the same thing."

"He's got his knife into me lately," went on Forsyth bitterly. "Says I'm slacking—giving too much time to cricket. Can you believe it? As if a fellow could give too much time to cricket. And now, on a Saturday evening, if you please, when I've got a visitor, he drags me in for an extra lesson. Just the two of us, and he's going to make me swot under his very eye! I call it criminal!"

"The man ought to be flayed alive!" said Travers. "People of that sort aren't fit to live! We have not saddle-bred of the same breed at St. Frank's—and I sometimes regret that rushing has gone out of fashion in this country. But don't mind me, Forsyth, old fellow. Go right ahead. I'll wander into the town and do a bit of shopping."

But when Travers reached the wide high street, after bidding a sympathetic farewell, the brief spell of sunshine was over. Heavy clouds rolled up again, and rain was descending in torrents.

It was only twenty-past-six, and there was no bus until a quarter-to-eight, so Travers decided to kill the time in the big cinema which graced the Helmford High Street. The bus park was only a minute's walk away, so he could have nearly an hour and a half of pictures.

As he approached the foyer, with its brilliant electric lights, he halted in his tracks, as though stricken. His gaze was irresistibly drawn towards something which stood against the curb.

"This," he muttered, "is sheer torture!"

He tried hard to walk on, but it was impossible. He had to examine that marvellous motor-cycle, which stood against the kerb in the rain. It was one of the very latest models—a glorious thing of glittering chromium and apple-green enamel. It was an even finer machine than Travers' late model. On the tank was a little demon

figure, in bright red, exemplifying speed.

Travers glanced across the pavement at the shop, opposite which the motor-cycle was parked. It was an optician's establishment, and at that moment the slim figure of a girl emerged. Their eyes met, and recognition was instantaneous and mutual.

"Well, well," said Travers, raising his cap. "The fair Irene herself, and, unless I am mistaken, I see trouble in those blue eyes!"

and the CHAPTER 4. The bu Damsel in Distress.

"YOU'NERS, of the Moor View school, was a nice girl. The fact that she was Edward Oswald Handforth's particular chum was proof enough of that. Moor View and St. Frank's were less than half a mile apart, and there were many healthy friendships between the schoolgirls and the schoolboys.

"Oh, Vivian, I'm in an awful mess!" said Irene unhappily.

He looked her up and down. She was wearing a light mac over her summer frock, and there were mud splashes on it. Her silk stockings and her dainty shoes were muddy, too.

"I wouldn't go as far as to say that," protested Travers. "Just a little muddy, perhaps—"

"I don't mean my clothes," she interrupted. "It's a thousand times worse than that. I'm in a dreadful hole, and I don't know which way to turn."

Travers swept off his cap.

"Command me, fair damsel in distress," he said gallantly. "If there is aught I can do to mitigate your plight, speak, and I fly to do your bidding. In other words, what's the trouble, old girl?"

She looked at him rather hopelessly; then her gaze strayed to the motor-cycle on the kerb, and suddenly

her pretty face flushed, and a sparkle came into her blue eyes.

"Yes, you can help me!" she cried breathlessly. "Oh, Vivian, you're the one fellow out of a thousand who can do it."

"You'll make me conceited if you talk like that," said Travers warningly.

"Please don't rot," she urged. "It's deadly serious, Vivian. Look here, did you mean it just now, when you offered to help me?"

"Of course I did."

"Then take me home—on that motor-bike."

"What!"

"It's nothing to a chap like you," went on the girl eagerly. "You're the finest rider at St. Frank's. There's time! I don't believe anybody else could get me home before seven, but you can!"

Vivian Travers' heart nearly stopped beating. He knew, in that second, that Irene Manners had heard nothing of his troubles. For if she had known, being the little sport she was, she would never have made this request.

Not by any sign did Travers reveal the thoughts that were passing in his mind. He appeared to be calmly considering the matter, yet his heart was pounding now. The temptation was tremendous.

"What about the owner of the velocipede?" he asked suddenly.

"He's in this shop."

"Mightn't he object?"

"No, he won't mind—he'll be glad to lend you the bike," said Irene. "Oh, what's the time? Can't I explain later?"

"Plenty of time," said Travers. "It's only twenty-three minutes past."

He knew that he was a fool to listen. With his career at stake, he should tell the girl just how things were. She was probably exaggerating, anyhow. She couldn't be in much of a corner. It would be a crazy thing to ride that motor-cycle—in full daylight, too.

"I can tell you in two jiffies," she said, holding tightly to his arm. "As it

was raining this afternoon, I went over to Caistowe with Marjorie and Doris. We were going to tea at the vicarage."

"A duty call, I imagine?"

"Of course! You don't think we like going to tea at vicarages?" said the girl. "Well, we met a friend of ours—Fay Lampson, of the Caistowe High School. I believe you know her."

"Small girl—sharp nose—glasses," said Travers, nodding. "Rather sporty, and game through and through. Yes, you introduced me once. I gave her a ride on my pillion, and she never turned a hair."

"That's the girl," said Irene. "Well, while we were talking, her brother Jim came along—on this motor-bike. It had stopped raining then, and the sun was shining. Jim's a nice boy, and he offered to take me for a run on the pillion, and I felt reckless and agreed."

"Naughty, naughty!" said Travers solemnly.

"Of course, it was terribly daring, but I never imagined there'd be all this trouble over it," went on the girl.

"Daring to go for a pillion ride?"

"Well, not really, I suppose," said Irene. "But Jim Lampson is three or four years older than I am, and pillion riding, in any case, is strictly forbidden by our headmistress. I took a chance because I had my mac on, and Jim lent me some goggles, and I was sure I shouldn't be recognised."

"Good luck to you!" said Travers. "A girl's no good unless she has a bit of spirit, and disobeys school rules now and again. What I can't understand is, why doesn't this Lampson bird take you back?"

"That's just it," she said, in distress. "While we were having tea here, the rain came on again. We waited a bit, but ten minutes ago Jim decided to start. We were just getting away when we had a bit of a skid. We didn't come off, or anything like that, but the sudden jerk made Jim drop his glasses, and they smashed to atoms."

"His goggles, do you mean?"

"He doesn't wear goggles; he's short-sighted, like his sister, and has to wear glasses with whacking thick lenses," said Irene. "He can't see a yard without them."

"A chap like that oughtn't to be allowed a licence."

"He's all right with his glasses, although he never does any speeding, like you do," said the girl.

"By Samson! With a machine like this, too," said Travers, eyeing the thing of glory. "So I suppose he's in this shop, getting new lenses fitted?"

"Yes, and the optician said it'll take at least half an hour," replied Irene. "And I must be in school before locking-up, Vivian. That's at seven o'clock—in only just over half an hour from now."

"Not much time to waste," agreed Travers smilingly, and giving no sign of the hard thinking he was doing.

"You see, there's no bus until a quarter to eight—I found that out first thing," continued the girl. "There's no train, either. What can I say to Miss Bond if I get in an hour late? I can't explain that I've been pillion riding, because it's forbidden. I can't tell her that I've been out for a ride—"

"No, you can't tell her the truth—and it's a cert that you wouldn't tell her any lies," interrupted Travers, with sudden crispness. "The best thing of all is to tell her nothing. And if you're to tell her nothing, you'll have to be in before locking-up. Then she won't ask any questions."

"I shall be expelled if Miss Bond hears anything about this," said Irene desperately. "You know that, Vivian, don't you? It'll mean the sack for me. Oh, please help me! Do!"

Such an appeal was more than he could resist. Besides, there was a great temptation. To ride again—to ride on this glorious motor-bike! Yet in fairness to Travers, it must be said that his main thought was to save the girl from getting into serious hot water. She did not know that he was banned from motor-cycling, and she had appealed to

him in her desperation. There was only one thing to be done.

After all, where was the risk? On a wet evening like this, even in daylight, who would see him or recognise him?

"Has this fellow Lampson got overalls?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," said Irene. "A crash helmet, too, with goggles fitted, although he never uses the goggles."

Travers nodded. He would use the goggles. What better disguise could he have?

"It's a go, Irene!" he said briskly.

"Oh, Vivian, you're a dear!" she cried. "Wait a jiffy, I'll fetch Jim."

Left alone for a minute, Travers did some more thinking. He was considering the question of time—and the route he would take. Once through Bannington, he would take the Moor road, and approach Irene's school from the rear, so that he would not have to pass St. Frank's. He could easily do it within the half-hour. Then he could get back to Helmsford by seven-thirty, or a few minutes later, and comfortably catch his bus.

Everything was fine. He would have a stolen ride, he would save Irene Manners from expulsion, and would get back to St. Frank's at the appointed time, and nobody would be any the wiser.

A tall, thin youth came out of the optician's shop with Irene. He peered eagerly forward at Travers, giving eloquent proof of his short-sightedness.

"Cutting it a bit fine, isn't it?" he asked. "Here, you'd better slip into my overalls." He handed them over. "My sister was telling me about you, Travers. She said your bike's better than mine."

"She's not much of a judge," replied Travers. "I didn't bring the jigger out this afternoon on account of the rain. Sure you're willing to trust me?"

"Of course," replied Jim Lampson. "You're a motor-cyclist—and a speed-merchant, too, according to Sis. Besides, we've got to get Irene back in her school before calling-over. This

infernal optician says he'll be another twenty minutes, and that would do it in properly. I'll be waiting here when you get back."

"Good man!" said Travers. "There's just one thing. I want both of you to promise me that you'll say nothing about this to a soul."

"I don't understand," said Irene, staring.

"No reason why you should," said Travers calmly. "Just a whim of mine, if you like. But there is a reason, all the same—no time to tell you now. Please promise me, both of you, that you won't mention a word to a living soul of my part in this business."

"Of course I promise," said Irene. "For my own sake alone I wouldn't say anything. I don't want the girls to be talking about it, or it might get to Miss Bond's ears. And you can trust Jim to say nothing."

"In any case, I'm off for London tomorrow, and I don't suppose I shall be in these parts for months," said Jim Lampson.

Travers secured the final hook. Then he fastened the crash-helmet and lowered the goggles.

"O.K.!" he said. "Just half-past six. Let's go."

He was glad that he had not told Irene of his father's ban, for he knew that if he had done so she would have refused to ride with him. She would have taken her medicine pluckily, rather than involve him in possible disaster.

He got into the saddle, Irene straddled the pillion, and the workman-like, decisive way in which Travers operated the kick-starter and engaged his gears gave Jim Lampson much comfort. He knew that his machine would be safe in the hands of this skilful driver. Travers got away splendidly, and within a minute or two they had left the centre of the town behind, and were taking to the wide main road.

Never in his life had the St. Frank's Removite experienced such exhilaration as gripped him now. To feel that

throbbing power unit beneath him was inexpressibly joyous. He knew that he was doing something forbidden, and therefore it was all the more thrilling. That reckless streak which was such a prominent part of his make-up was now in full control.

"Who cares?" sang his thoughts.

Speed—speed—speed! He revelled in it, gloried in it. And that machine under him was capable of very high speed, indeed. The roads were so wet that they were safe. Skidding was only a remote possibility. Jim Lampson, in starting off, must have struck a greasy patch, perhaps where taxi-cabs were accustomed to park. But here, on the open road, the surface was dead safe.

Thirty—forty—fifty! The speedometer, just beneath Travers' nose, registered the increasing speed. Travers gloated, and Irene Manners clung to him confidently. She was glorying in the exhilarating speed, too.

The rain meant nothing—or, at least, if it did mean anything, it was all to the good. For the road was virtually deserted, and pedestrians in Bannington would be few. Travers grinned as he opened the throttle wider. He would streak through Bannington like lightning, and he was willing to wager a term's pocket-money that nobody would recognise him.

Now that the die was cast and he was actually on the adventure, he was serenely happy. His hand was steady, his eye sure, and he was as cool as ice. In order to reach the Moor View School before seven, he would have to keep up an average of over forty miles an hour. Easy! He'd get Irene home with five minutes to spare.

Along a two-mile straight, where there was no living soul in sight, he got that motor-cycle up to seventy miles an hour, and he took no risks. Down to forty approaching a curve, down to twenty-five on the curve itself, then another straight stretch, with the speedometer needle creeping up and up again.

After that a hill, with the engine

throbbing with super power. Then a dip, slow again for a curve, and on once more.

"Too fast for you?" he yelled, halting turning his head.

"Glorious!" cried Irene. "What a driver you are, Vivian!"

"You're telling me!" retorted Travers, with a chuckle.

Only a few miles from Bannington now, and the ride more than half over. It seemed only a few minutes since they had left Helmford. Travers reduced speed considerably, for there was a sharp corner ahead. Just round the bend a figure in glaring yellow overalls was standing in the very middle of the road, with outstretched arms. In a word, an A.A. scout. He was signalling to Travers to stop.

Only for a moment did Travers hesitate. He was tempted to roar past with accelerating engine, remembering, as he did, that minutes were precious. But there was a low, rakish-looking motor-car standing by the roadside—a sports' saloon, with stream-lined body. Obviously a motorist in distress, or the A.A. scout would not be signalling.

Travers found it impossible to ignore the courtesy of the road; Irene, great as her hurry was, would never forgive him if he "roadhogged" straight past. That sort of thing simply wasn't done. Besides, it would only take a moment. He applied his brakes, slipped out the clutch, and came to a standstill, with engine ticking over.

"Sorry to pull you up, sir," said the A.A. scout, walking briskly up. "I wonder if you'd mind telling the people at the next garage—there's one a couple of miles down the road—to come out here with a breakdown car?"

"Right," said Travers, and prepared to go.

As he had anticipated, the delay was trivial. But before he could engage gears and slip the clutch in, the Automobile Association man had taken a step nearer.

"Well!" he exclaimed, his weather-

eatened, rain-soaked face breaking into a smile of recognition. "It's you, Master Travers, isn't it?"

Travers had recognised the patrolman at the first moment, and now he raised the goggles from his eyes.

"Don't mind if I dash off, Reeves, do you?" he said. "In a bit of a hurry."

"Right you are, sir," grinned the A.A. man, with a sly glance at Irene. "I get you! These young gentlemen in the car have got ignition trouble."

"I'll tell them at the garage," said Travers. "I really must be going—"

"Oh!" came an exclamation from Irene.

He glanced at her, and found that he was looking across the road at the parked car. Travers looked, too, and a youth who had just climbed out of the car gave Travers a mocking salute.

If he had possessed a tail and horns, Vivian Travers could not have been more dismayed, for the youth was Bernard Forrest, the unscrupulous cad of the St. Frank's Remove!

CHAPTER 5.

The Whip Hand.

NOTHING could have been more ill-starred than this meeting.

Yet, such is the perversity of things in this life, it was just what might have been expected.

A fellow will go out "dressed up to the nines" in the finest of weather, and he will meet nobody of consequence. But let him go out in a shabby suit and a dirty collar, then he will meet the cream of the elite!

Travers whipped his goggles back into place, but he knew that it was too late.

"No good lockin' the stable after the horse has gone, old man," said Forrest, lounging forward, his eyes glowing with vindictive satisfaction. "By gad, does your mother know you're out—or, rather, your pater?"

"You don't understand," said Travers.

"That's just where you're wrong, dear boy—I understand perfectly," replied Forrest mockingly. "And the fair Irene, too." He had the grace to raise his cap. "Just been out for a little spin, I suppose? How delightful—but how risky! Still, they say that forbidden fruit is the sweetest of all, don't they?"

"Shut up, confound you," snapped Travers, giving him a warning glance.

"Oh, don't worry," grinned Bernard Forrest. "I'm a sport, and I'll keep mum. You can trust me not to tell a soul."

The A.A. man naturally thought that Forrest was referring to the girl; and Irene herself, at first, believed that such was the case. Later, she had her doubts.

"Not your own machine, of course," continued Forrest. "I wonder if its owner knows that by lending it to you he had jeopardised your entire future? You always was a reckless fellow, Travers—"

But the roar of the accelerating engine drowned his words; Travers let the clutch in so fiercely that the machine fairly leapt away, and Irene received a jolt. It was difficult for her to question her companion, for Travers was now driving with fierce abandon. His former caution on curves had gone; he went tearing round at an alarming speed.

The delay had been longer than he had anticipated; and within a minute or two he pulled up with screeching brakes outside a wayside garage. Fortunately, a mechanic appeared at once.

"There's a car about two miles back—ignition trouble," shouted Travers. "They want you to take your breakdown car out to them at once."

"Right-ho, sir," called the mechanic. "I'll see to it."

Travers waved, and a moment later he and Irene were off again. This delay had been a matter of mere seconds; but Travers knew how ruinous the shortest of stops can be to a carefully worked-out average.

He wasn't driving the motor-cycle at

a dangerous speed now because he liked it—but because it was a necessity. He had an awful fear that the gates of the Moor View School would be closed.

Greatly as he gloried in taking chances, he had never whipped through Bannington at such a speed as on this occasion. Fortunately, the rain was so heavy that there was little or no traffic, and even the police were conspicuous by their absence.

With the machine leaning over at a hair-raising angle, they tore round into a side road—a short cut. With engine roaring, and echoing against the walls on either hand, they shot out of the town, and reached the moor road.

Here Travers "gave her the gun," and in a few moments the motor-cycle was going all out on that barren, empty road. Sixty—seventy—seventy-three! Even Irene, trustful of Travers as she was, became alarmed.

"Oh, go slower!" she panted, clinging to Travers with both her slim arms round his body. "It isn't worth it, Vivian."

So great was the rush of wind past his ears that he did not hear her, although he knew she had shouted something. He bent lower, his gaze glued to the road ahead. On—on, bumping, swaying. At last, the lonely old ruined mill—then the curve, and the moor was left behind. With grating brakes, Travers pulled up. The wall of the Moor View School was not a hundred yards ahead; the gates were still wide open.

"How's that, old girl?" he said serenely. "Just two minutes to seven—and all's well."

"You're a wonder, Vivian!" exclaimed Irene, her eyes shining. "I never dreamed you'd do it. What a pity we met that horrid Forrest!"

"Forget him," advised Travers. "Better buck up now—"

"But just a minute," urged the girl, grasping his arm. "What did Forrest mean? What was that he said about your career being in danger? And

why should he say that he'll keep you secret?"

"Gas, my sweetheart—pure gas," replied Travers. "Now, trot along in, on all my valiant efforts will have been for nothing."

"I think you're a brick—and I thank you ever so much," said the girl warmly. "I do hope you won't get into any trouble over it"

She ran off, reached the gate, and gave a final wave as she disappeared. Travers sighed and turned his machine round.

"Handy's a lucky blighter to have a girl like that for his 'best,'" he murmured. "As for Forrest, there's nothing to worry about. He's one of the biggest liars in the school, and nobody will believe him if he talks."

He decided that he, himself, would adopt a lofty, indifferent attitude. He would neither deny nor acknowledge Forrest's story—if Forrest was bad enough to spread it about. After all it was only Forrest's word. He had no actual proof.

Travers rode back at high speed—but not dangerously—and he enjoyed every moment of that exhilarating run. He had meant to have a word with Forrest, but the sports car had now vanished. Evidently the repair man had done a satisfactory job.

In Helmford, Travers found Jim Lampson waiting—duly fitted up with new glasses.

"Everything all serene," said Travers, as he handed the machine over. "I got her back in time, so there's nothing for you to worry about."

"Very sporty of you," said the other. "But you must have set the road on fire."

"Who wouldn't—on a machine like this," replied Travers. "She's a corker. Glasses all right now? Good! I'll be getting along to my bus."

That bus ride home, after his recent speed-riding, seemed even slower than the outward journey, and Travers chafed and fretted more than ever. But Belton was reached on schedule.

time, and Travers duly reported himself to a prefect with his pass. So everything was all right.

The adventure was over—but the consequences of that mad hour was only just beginning!

Travers fully expected that Bernard Forrest would bring up the unwelcome subject of the motor-bike in the Common-room. But Forrest never mentioned a word. True, on the Sunday morning he happened to meet Travers in the lobby of the Ancient House, and he grinned.

"One of these days you'll take a chance—and it'll turn round and bite you," he remarked. "I'd go easy, if I were you."

That was Forrest's only reference to the affair; and Travers began to think that he had misjudged the dandified leader of Study A. Instead of talking amongst the fellows about the incident, Forrest kept mum—as he had promised.

"Queer!" decided Travers. "But I dare say the fellow has a latent spark of decency in him somewhere."

So it seemed to have blown over. Nobody else had been a witness, no questions were asked, and Travers began to wonder if it would be possible to steal another forbidden ride, on a future occasion. He was consoled by the thought that he had refused to promise his father anything. So, in taking that ride, he had not broken any pledged word. True, if Mr. Travers heard of it, he would come down with a hard hand. But that possibility was so remote that it was not worthy of consideration.

Thus, Wednesday came.

It was a glorious morning, and the St. Frank's Junior XI had a match on for the afternoon against Bannington Grammar School. Travers had already selected his team, and the list had been put on the board over night.

"I think we ought to win," said Nipper, after early morning practice at the nets. "You're in tip-top form just now, Travers. The Grammarian bowlers won't be able to touch you."

"You're not so bad yourself," replied Travers. "Handy's improving, too."

"What do you mean—improving?" demanded Handforth. "That implies that I've been off form."

"Have you forgotten the Midshott match, old fellow?" murmured Travers.

"Rats! I'll admit I scored a duck, but that was a fluke," growled Handforth. "To-day I'm going to get my century."

"I hope you're right," said the skipper. "I don't mind telling you, Handy, that yours was the doubtful name on my list."

"If you're trying to pull my leg——"

"Not at all," said Travers. "It was a toss-up between you and Gresham. So I tossed up—head you, tails Gresham. The coin came down heads, so I put your name in."

Handforth was aghast.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that you decided on a chap for the team by tossing a coin?" he demanded.

"Why not?"

"But that was gambling—with me!" roared Handforth.

"If that's so, old chap, we gamble every time we start a match," replied Travers urbanely. "Don't we toss as to which side should bat first?"

"That's different," grunted Handforth. "Besides, why should you have any doubts about me. I've never heard of such nerve!"

"Well, don't get hot about it," smiled the captain. "You're in—Gresham's out. Just as well, perhaps, because I hear that he strained a tendon at practice yesterday."

"Have you got anybody else in mind in case I turn bilious, or something?" asked Handforth sarcastically.

"Forrest, perhaps."

"Forrest!" howled the burly leader of Study D. "You'd give my place to that cad?"

"I'm beginning to think he's not so bad as he's painted," replied Travers, with more earnestness than his tone implied. "You've seen how he's been

working at the nets? He's good, too. He's shaping well. In any case, a fellow's everyday faults mustn't be allowed to interfere with his cricket. I could mention two or three County men, dazzlingly brilliant on the field, who are perfect outsiders in private life."

"You're talking rot," said Handforth. "Only decent chaps play cricket."

"The illusions of extreme youth are very beautiful," said Travers, shaking his head. "Keep them as long as you can, Handy."

He strolled away, smiling.

"You—you burling fathead——" began Handforth.

"Cheese it!" grinned Nipper. "Don't you know Travers by this time? He was only kidding you."

"Oh, was he?" snorted Handforth. "Well, a chap who talks like that oughtn't to be junior skipper! Why the dickens don't you get hold of the reins again?"

"Because I'm likely to be called away any day," replied Nipper. "I must admit that the chances are getting more remote. I believe my gov'nor is going through that forgery case without me. Still, I'm happy enough. Travers is doing well, and good luck to him."

Travers, meanwhile, had reached Study H. Jimmy Potts—in other words, Sir James Potts, Bart.—was just coming out.

"Oh, here you are," said the school-boy baronet. "There's a visitor for you, old man. I didn't quite like the atmosphere, so I came out."

Travers went into the study, and found Bernard Forrest lounging comfortably in an easy chair.

"The very man," he said, without altering his position. "I'm here to talk about cricket, Travers."

"Again?"

"I'm a persistent chap," nodded Forrest. "Better shut the door. This talk of ours must be private."

There was a subtle difference in Bernard Forrest's tone; on previous occa-

sions he had been polite, even humble. Now he was arrogantly confident. A square look came into Travers' jaw.

"What's the racket?" he asked bluntly.

"No racket, old boy," said Forrest. "I want a place in the eleven for this afternoon's match, that's all."

"My team is made up, and you know it."

"Can't you make an alteration?"

"I could; but I'm not going to."

"Somehow," said Forrest, "I think you are. You're going to give me my place in the team to-day, Travers, and you're going to like it."

He rose to his feet with languid ease and grinned with mocking triumph.

"You're using a queer tone," said Travers steadily. "No cricket captain worth his salt allows a fellow to dictate to him——"

"There are exceptions in every rule," said Forrest. "I'm dictating to you, Travers, and you're going to do nothing about it—except do as I tell you. Have you, by any chance, forgotten Saturday evening?"

"For the love of Samson!" ejaculated Travers, eyeing his companion up and down. "So that's it! As you had said nothing, I had given you the credit of being decent. Well, well! He was a wise man who said that the leopard can't change his spots. You're even more contemptible than I believed."

"You can't upset me by calling me names," said Forrest calmly. "I'm prepared for abuse. But the fact remains that you'll put me in the team."

Travers began to roll up his sleeves.

"Will you go out of the study quietly?" he asked, "or shall I throw you out?"

Forrest read the flashing danger signals in the Junior captain's eyes and he dropped his mockery.

"You'll give me my place, or I'll let your pater know that you disobeyed his orders," he said.

"You worm!" said Travers in disgust. "Do you think I'm frightened of

your threats? My word is better than yours, and you can do your worst."

"Would you lie about it?"

"I'm not above indulging in a few clean lies if the occasion demands," retorted Travers. "In any case, I'd rather lie like a trooper than submit to your blackmailing tactics. Have I made myself plain? Will you now get out?"

"I'm staying right here," replied Forrest. "There's something you've forgotten. If your father knew about your motor-bike ride on Saturday, you'll get taken away from the school."

"I'll risk it."

"And a certain fair-haired, blue-eyed young lady will be sacked from Moor View!"

"What!"

"You heard me."

"Why, confound you, you don't mean —" Travers paused, aghast. "You wouldn't do a thing like that, Forrest?"

"I shan't be able to help myself," replied Forrest. "If I let the cat out of the bag as far as you are concerned, Irene Manners' name is certain to come out, too. Hard luck on her, of course. Her headmistress will hear about it, she'll make inquiries, and the fair Irene is certain to get it in the neck."

"You hound!" said Travers hoarsely. "You low, scheming, dirty hound! Get out of here and do your worst! Shout it from the housetops—and I'll deny every word! The fellows will believe me sooner than you."

Forrest grinned.

"Have you forgotten the A.A. scout?" he asked gently.

Travers had, and at the reminder he fairly jumped.

"Reeves, the A.A. scout, is my trump card," went on Forrest before his victim could speak. "I wouldn't dream of involving my pal Hardacre; he was with me in that sports car, you remember. It was his car, and I was out for a run with him. But we'll forget him. Reeves will be my star witness if you push things to the limit."

Travers was suddenly comforted.

"Reeves is a thoroughly decent man," he said. "I've known him for a long time. He wouldn't be a party to any dirty trickery."

"Exactly," agreed Forrest calmly. "That's just the point. Reeves' honesty and trustworthiness will clinch the thing completely. He is an independent, disinterested witness, and he will be produced as such."

Travers was silent; his active, ingenious brain was trying to work out some escape from this trap.

"I've got you here," said Forrest, tapping the palm of his hand. "What's more, Travers, I'm going to use you. You won't like it, of course, but that'll make no difference. You'll do as I say or—poof!—up goes your number!"

Travers was not thinking of himself; his thoughts continually went back to Irene. That A.A. scout had seen the girl; he probably knew her by sight, perhaps by name. If Forrest "spilt the beans" the Moor View girl would be involved. At last Travers appreciated Forrest's silence. He had kept quiet in order to further his own ends. Travers dare not speak for fear of spoiling his career; Irene Manners dare not speak for fear of getting the sack; and Forrest had kept the secret because he saw that he could make profit out of it.

"There's no reason at all why we shouldn't keep this little affair to ourselves—just the three of us," said Forrest, as he sat on a corner of the table. "You, Irene, and me."

Travers glared at him.

"Keep the girl's name out of it!" he muttered.

"Why should I?" said Forrest coolly. "She's in the know, isn't she? Well, what's your answer, Travers? Am I in the team for to-day's match?"

"No!" replied Vivian Travers curtly.

He had made up his mind, and he stared defiantly into Forrest's eyes.

"You don't mean—"

"I mean that you can go ahead—and be hanged to you!" said Travers. "Rather than submit to your con-

founded blackmail, I'll take my medicine."

Bernard Forrest got off the table, startled. This did not suit his book at all. Travers was not crumpling up in the approved manner.

"I suppose you realise what it means?" he said unpleasantly.

"I realise everything."

"Do you!" sneered Forrest. "I'm not bluffing, Travers. If you don't do as I tell you I'll go straight out of this study and I'll send a telegram to your father!"

"Go ahead!"

"He gave you his orders about a week ago, and you can be certain that he'll come straight down," continued Forrest. "He'll only need to question the A.A. man, and he'll know that you disobeyed him. Reeves knows nothing of the issues, and he's honest, anyhow. When your pater questions him he'll promptly say that he saw you on a motorbike on Saturday evening—with a girl on the pillion."

"Yes, I realise that," said Travers.

"You needn't think you can bribe Reeves—"

"I leave dirty trickery of that sort to your kind!" snapped Travers. "Reeves is the honourable employee of an honourable association, and I shan't interfere with him."

"Then your pater will know the truth."

"So what?" said Travers steadily.

"You know what, you fool! He'll take you away from St. Frank's."

"Well, it's my funeral," said Travers. "I'd rather leave the school than submit—"

"And Irene?"

"You made one mistake, Forrest," said Vivian Travers. "You're assuming that Reeves recognised Irene. I don't believe he did. I will admit to my pater that I had a girl on the pillion, but her name won't come out."

"But I'll see that it does."

"Are you really as contemptible as all that?" asked Travers in disgust. "Would you get a girl disgraced just

for the sake of vindictive spite? But I'm not worrying. I know my pater. If I admit my own guilt he'll make no further inquiries."

Forrest was as calm as a panther, and he played his ace.

"I think you are the one who has made a mistake, Travers," he said silkily. "Your opinion of the fair Miss Manners seems to be pretty low."

Travers started.

"What do you mean?" he asked fiercely.

"Well, my opinion of Irene is high," replied Forrest. "I'll bet she didn't know when she took a pillion ride with you that you had been banned from motor-cycling. Otherwise she wouldn't have—"

"Cut it short!" snapped Travers.

"What are you getting at?"

"Isn't it simple?" asked Forrest.

"When Irene hears that you are being taken away from the school for disobeying your pater, what will she do? Just sit tight and say nothing? Is she that kind of girl? Do you think she'll let you suffer and go scot-free herself?"

"You—you—"

"Save it!" grinned Forrest, his triumph complete. "You know what Irene will do, don't you? When she hears of your trouble she'll go straight to your pater and tell him the truth. I'm not a fool. I guess that you were rushing her home so that she would be in time for locking up. She'll tell your pater that you rode that motor-bike for her sake. So, even if your pater relents and allows you to remain on at the school, Irene will have to take the rap."

"My father wouldn't peach on her," said Travers, grasping at his last straw.

"You're assuming that the inquiry would be private," retorted Forrest, relentlessly pressing his advantage. "But unless you knuckle under to me I'll see that the whole school knows of your adventure. The fellows will talk, Irene's name will be on every lip, and the Beaks at her school are certain to hear. Make no mistake, Travers—you won't be able to avoid a public inquiry."

If you press me to the limit, and a public inquiry will mean 'finis' for Irene Manners. There'll be such a scandal that Miss Bond will be compelled to make an example of her to restore the fair name of the Moor View School."

Bernard Forrest had played his hand in a brilliant, masterly way, and Travers saw at last that he was hopelessly in the trap. There was no way out of this tangle. Forrest held the whip-hand.

CHAPTER 6.

Handforth Goes Off the Deep End.

DISGRACE—disaster—ruin!

Vivian Travers would have taken his own medicine like a man, but to involve Irene Manners in disaster was unthinkable. It would be the act of a cad. For her sake, if not for his own, he must submit to the pressure of Bernard Forrest's thumb.

He saw it all clearly. There was no escape. Even if the inquiry was private—even if the Removites rallied round Travers to defeat Forrest and keep Irene's name out of it—there were always plenty of malicious tongues. There was the risk that Irene would get into serious trouble.

"Well?" came Forrest's mocking inquiry.

His voice galvanised Travers into action. Fury blazed from his eyes, and with clenched fists he leapt at his tormentor.

"You unutterable cad!" he panted fiercely.

Crash!

His knuckles drove hard against the side of Forrest's head. In the nick of time Forrest had dodged, or his features would have been marred. He reeled and staggered to the other side of the study table.

"You fool!" he snarled. "I didn't come here to fight—"

"But you're going to fight," said Travers thickly. "I'll smash you, you cur!"

Forrest, now thoroughly alarmed,

whipped up a chair and held it in front of him. Against such a barrier Travers' fists were useless.

"This'll do you no good, confound you!" panted Forrest. "Keep back! You're whacked, and you know it."

Travers' rage was short-lived. He suddenly dropped his fists. Brawling like this was undignified and foolish. He was only giving a clear proof of his helplessness. And if he smashed Forrest to pulp, he would precipitate the very disaster he was so anxious to avoid. For Forrest, thus pulped, would go the whole hog.

"Silly, isn't it?" said Travers so coolly, so urbanely, that Forrest stared. "Put that chair down. I'm not going to hurt you."

Forrest lowered the chair cautiously. "You win," went on Travers. "A sensible fellow when he finally realises that he's in the hands of a blackmailing crook submits like a gentleman."

"Am I in the team?" asked Forrest gloatingly.

"Yes, you're in the team," said Travers. "Now get out, will you, or do you want to stay here and crow? I'd better warn you that I'm only submitting—"

"For Irene's sake!" sneered Forrest. "Noble, chivalrous chap!"

"If a girl wasn't involved in the matter I'd kick you from here to Belton," said Travers steadily. "You know it, Forrest, and you're taking advantage— But why discuss it any longer? I'm knuckling under. What more do you want? As long as you keep absolutely mum and say nothing about Irene we'll carry on."

"You can trust me," grinned Forrest, as he strolled to the door. "It's a go, then. No reason why we shouldn't be polite."

"There's no reason why we should," retorted Travers. "Get out!"

Forrest was wise enough to depart without uttering any further taunts. He had won the day, and he was satisfied.

Alone, Vivian Travers sat down with

a feeling of heavy, overwhelming despondency.

There was no way out of this fix. He was tied hand and foot. Bernard Forrest held him in a stranglehold. And to know that he was in the power of such a cad was an unpleasant thought.

"It's mighty ugly," he told himself icily cool. "Yet there must be some way out. Forrest's a schemer—but I'm something of a schemer, too. Vivian, old fellow, you've got to put your wits to work. Somehow or other you've got to turn the tables on this slug!"

He was consoled by the thought. For the time being he would submit—yes, he would allow Forrest to believe that he was submitting meekly. But sooner or later he would find a way out, and then he would turn the tables. Above all else, he must save Irene Manners from any possible trouble, and to ensure that he must keep quiet and obey Forrest's orders.

Admittedly he could think of no solution to the problem, but he was ready to back his wits against Forrest's. He would play the fox; he would wait. Meanwhile, there was likely to be a spot or two of unpleasantness.

Travers shrugged.

"When an unpleasant thing has to be done, the best course is to do it with a smile," he decided. "But, by Samson, there'll be a day of reckoning for this!"

His face was drawn and haggard, his eyes moody. Yet, five minutes later, when he strolled out into the sunny Triangle, he had completely masked his private emotions. He was the same smiling, irresponsible Travers of old.

A yell, long and loud, suddenly sounded in the Ancient House lobby. There could be no mistaking that roaring voice. It belonged to the one and only Handforth.

"Hi! Mac! Churchy!" bellowed Handforth. "Look at this!"

Handforth, having changed from his flannels, had just come down, and he was standing against the notice-board. His face was red, and his eyes were

fierce. Church and McClure were coming downstairs.

Travers, outside, leaned against the masonry, idly filing his finger-nails.

"What's up, Handy?" asked Church from the staircase.

"Look at this!" thundered Handforth.

Church and McClure hurried down and inspected the notice on the board. It was the list of names of the Junior XI team.

"Hallo!" said Church. "Your name's crossed off, Handy."

Handforth tried to speak, but failed.

"And Forrest's is substituted," said McClure.

Handforth appeared to be choking.

"A joke, of course," said Church.

"A joke!" howled Handforth, becoming articulate at last. "Do you call it a joke to cross my name off? Just wait until I catch the blithering idiot who did this!"

"It's funny!" said Mac, frowning.

"If you call it funny to play monkey tricks——"

"I don't mean funny in that sense," interrupted the Scottish junior. "Look here, Travers himself has initialled this alteration, and that makes it official."

Handforth's eyes appeared to be in danger of popping out of his head.

"It must be a forgery!" he gasped. "Travers himself wouldn't play such a low-down trick——"

"It's a point you can easily settle," interrupted Church. "Travers is only just outside, sunning himself on the steps."

Handforth spun round and strode out. Vivian Travers, still filing his finger-nails, did not even look up. He knew quite well that the storm was about to burst, but he was prepared for it.

In some ways he was a whimsical sort of fellow, and he knew that in crossing Handforth's name off he would arouse a miniature cyclone. For Handforth was the one member of the team who could be trusted to "raise Cain." Any one of the other fellows would have objected,

of course—but not with the volcanic violence of Handforth.

However, Travers had considered the matter, and he had come to the conclusion that he had no alternative. It was Handforth or nobody. For, prior to that interview with Forrest, he had publicly said that Handforth's name had been the only doubtful one on the list. Therefore, in order to be consistent, Handforth had to be dropped.

"Hey, you!" said Handforth aggressively.

Travers took no notice.

"Hey, Travers, you boulder!"

"Talking to me?" asked Travers, looking up.

"Didn't you hear me the first time?"

"I thought you were calling to some dog," explained Travers mildly. "You sounded like a feudal lord bellowing to one of his serfs."

"Do you know anything about my name being taken out of to-day's team?" demanded Handforth truculently.

"I know everything about it, old man," said Travers. "I, with my little pencil, crossed your name off."

"A joke is a joke, you funny idiot—"

"Unfortunately, this isn't a joke," said Travers gently. "Sorry, Handy, old fellow, but after seeing you at the nets this morning, and after thinking things over, I've decided to give you a rest."

Handforth gaped.

"You're not serious?" he babbled.

"Perfectly."

"You mean that you're playing Forrest instead of me?" shouted Handforth.

"No need to throw a fit, old fellow," said Travers calmly. "I feel that I owe you an apology—so I herewith apologise. I shouldn't have put your name down in the first place. But a cricket skipper, after all, has as much right to change his mind as anybody else. So that's all there is to it."

He nodded and strolled away. Handforth was so thunderstruck that he

stood with his mouth opening and shutting like a freshly landed fish. Only weird and inarticulate sounds issued from his mouth.

"My only sainted aunt," said Church. "Then it wasn't a joke at all, Mac! Travers has actually dropped Handy out of the team."

Before McClure could reply, an absolutely fiendish yell came from Handforth. His face was red and mottled, and his eyes had a dazed look in them.

"Where is he?" he panted, staring round. "Which way did he go?"

Without waiting to be informed, he dashed indoors, and in the lobby he crashed headlong into Nipper and Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. So violent was the impact that they all went flying.

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie, rescuing his pince-nez in the nick of time. "Is it an earthquake, or have we started another war?"

"Where is he?" thundered Handforth.

There was a wild, dangerous look in his eye now, and Church and McClure, rushing up, grabbed him.

"Easy, old man!" said Church urgently.

"Where's Travers?" hooted Handforth.

"What do you want Travers for?" asked Nipper. "Are you going to murder him, or something?"

"Haven't you seen the notice-board?" bawled Handforth. "Travers has cut me out of the team!"

"What!"

"And he's given my place to Forrest!" continued the leader of Study D, in a strangled voice. "Do you understand that? To Forrest! He's given my place to that smoky outsider! Where is he? Either he puts me back in the team, or I'll slaughter him!"

He went raving about the school like a human hurricane. No sooner had he vanished through West Arch than Travers himself appeared from East Arch.

"What's the idea of playing monkey-

tricks with Handy?" asked Nipper, walking up. "You know how touchy he is."

"Is that my fault?" interrupted Travers. "I'm cricket skipper, and I've come to a certain decision. Why all this fuss?"

"You mean that you're playing Forrest in Handforth's place?"

"Certainly I am," said Travers. "Why shouldn't I? Forrest is good, and he deserves— Well, we'll let it go at that."

He felt that he could not trust himself to state what Bernard Forrest deserved. But there was no doubt that Forrest was definitely in the team.

During morning lessons, Handforth was like a caged tiger. He got into trouble with Mr. Crowell so many times that he grew indifferent to the impositions which were showered upon him. It was only when the Form-master threatened to cancel his half-holiday that he calmed down.

Travers remained as cheerful and care-free as ever—to all outward appearance.

Forrest gloated blatantly, and with insufferable conceit. He could not have been more triumphant if he had gained his place through merit, and not through unscrupulous scheming. He was particularly tickled by the fact that it had been Handforth who was dropped, for Forrest disliked the open, outspoken Handforth more than any other fellow in the Remove.

"And I always thought that Travers was a decent chap," said Handforth bitterly after lessons.

He had got over his rage now, but he was very hurt. It amazed him to find that most of his Form-fellows took a very casual view of the situation. They sympathised with him, and, in the main, they considered that Travers had "done the dirty" on him; but they only laughed when he suggested that Travers should be forcibly pitched out of the captaincy and sent to Coventry.

"It's only one of his fits," said Church soothingly. "Travers is like that, you know. He does all sorts of unexpected things."

"But why pick on me?" demanded Handforth gruffly. "I'll bet he's wild because his pater has forbidden him to ride a motor-bike. By George, that's it! He's been pining and bottling up, and now he's venting his spite on me!"

"Rats!" said McClure. "He hasn't missed his motor-bike at all—no so that you would notice, anyhow."

"He's deep," said Handforth darkly. "He's as deep as a giddy well! Anyhow, I've finished with him! I'm never going to speak to him again!"

"Now, don't be an ass—" began Church.

"I mean it!" declared Handforth fiercely. "If he comes to me on his knees, and begs me to speak to him, I refuse! I wash him right out—Hand Travers!"

The junior skipper had just appeared, and he turned a smiling face.

"Give it a rest, old fellow," he said. "You're wearing me down."

"That's just what I mean to do," said Handforth. "Look here! Be sport! Come out to the nets with me now—and bring Forrest. Give us ten minutes' practice each, and if Forrest bats better than I do, I'll—"

"Sorry, old son; it can't be done now," interrupted Travers. "What sort of skipper do you think I am? I can't fool about with the team like that. I dare say I'll be able to put you in the eleven again next week."

He walked on, and Handforth found that Church and McClure were grinning.

"What's the joke?" he asked suspiciously.

"I thought you said you were never going to speak to Travers again?" asked Church.

"By George!" exclaimed Handforth with a start. "I'd forgotten that!"

When the Grammarians arrived

They were bright and smiling, and the afternoon was blazingly hot. The sun rode in a clear sky of crystal blue, and there was the slightest of breezes to offset the heat.

The Grammarians won the toss, and elected to bat first. So Travers and his men took the field, and the unhappy Handforth for once moped along the boundary as a spectator.

"Well, I don't like Forrest, and I haven't got much of an opinion of him as a cricketer," he growled. "But for the side's sake, I hope he plays a good game. By George! If he doesn't——"

First and last, Handforth was a sportsman; and bitter as his feelings were, he wished Forrest well—now that Forrest was definitely in the team. There were others, not so sporting, who secretly preyed that Forrest would fumble catches, and get dismissed for a duck.

Travers, outwardly so calm and undisturbed, was actually seriously affected. He showed nothing; everybody believed him to be his own placid, level-headed self. But he wasn't. Behind all his seeming calmness he was seething with rage against Forrest. His balance was upset; his mind was distracted, his powers of concentration affected.

In striking contrast to his usual play, he proved to be the poorest member of the team to-day. He neglected to change the bowling, when the bowlers were obviously delivering the kind of stuff the batsmen liked; he was slow in fielding, and he missed two or three good chances.

He knew that he was making a bad show, and he tried hard to pull himself together. Consequently, he was erratic. For five or ten minutes he would be as brilliant as ever; then he would allow his thoughts to wander, and his interest in the game—that vital interest which is necessary in cricket—dwindled.

"What's the matter with the man?" demanded Handforth irritably. "Did you see that throw-in just now? He sent the ball to the wrong end. If he

had been a bit nippler he might have got the fellow out."

"He's off colour," said Church, shaking his head.

They were standing near the pavilion, and, attracted by girlish voices, they glanced round. Irene Manners was approaching, and with her were Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple and Mary Summers. The four Moor View girls looked very fresh and dainty in their summer frocks.

"Why, Ted!" exclaimed Irene, as she came up. "You're not playing!"

Handforth gave a careless shrug.

"Must give somebody else a chance," he said, with a feeble smile.

"But you always play in the school games," said Irene. "You're not unfit, are you?"

"Travers turned him down," said Church, somewhat tactlessly. "Cut him right out, and gave his place to Forrest."

"I don't believe it," said Irene stoutly. "Vivian Travers wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Oh, wouldn't he?" fumed Handforth, all his old animosity returning. "Well, that's just what he did do, the bouncer! I've finished with him. We're no longer on speaking terms."

"But Vivian is such a sport——" began the girl.

"You don't know him."

"But I do know him," said Irene confidently. "I know him very well, indeed. There must have been some good reason for him dropping you, Ted."

"Spite," said Handforth gloomily. "He can't take it out of his pater, so he's taking it out of me."

"But I don't understand."

"Oh, it's nothing—perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it," said Handforth. "Great Scott! Travers is changing the bowling at last. About time, too! He's putting Jerry Dodd on at that end. Now we shall see something."

The other girls had drifted away, and Church and McClure had wandered off,

too. Handforth and Irene were left by themselves.

"What did you mean about Travers being spiteful towards his father?" asked Irene.

"Oh that motor-bike business."

"Motor-bike!" exclaimed Irene, with a little jump. "But I thought—Has Travers been talking about last Saturday?"

"Saturday?" repeated Handforth. "Nothing happened on Saturday. He went over to Helmsford, I believe—by bus. He came back by bus, too. Besides, he couldn't have been motor-cycling on Saturday."

"Why not?"

"Because of his pater."

"Ted, you really are exasperating," cried Irene, pulling him by the arm. "Can't you forget the game for a minute? What has Travers' father to do with motor-cycling?"

"By George! You haven't heard, then?" said Handforth, looking at her with surprise. "No, I suppose you wouldn't hear a thing like that. You remember the Midshott match? Well, when Travers was coming home on his motor-bike, he had a terrific crash. I meant to tell you, but we haven't seen much of one another lately—what with our cricket and your tennis—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the girl. "I did hear something about it, too. Wasn't Travers taken to hospital? But it turned out to be a trifle, and I never gave it another thought."

"Well, I bet Travers has been thinking of it ever since," said Handforth. "His pater came down here, raving like the dickens. Forbade him to ever ride another motor-bike, and threatened all sorts of awful consequences if he did. That's why he went over to Helmsford last Saturday by bus."

Irene was very startled. In a flash, she remembered how Travers had hesitated on that wet evening. At the time she had thought nothing of it, but now—

"What will his father do if he disobeys?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing much—only take him away from the school."

"What!"

"Fact," said Handforth. "His pater told him that if he rides a mere half mile on a motor-bike, he'll take him straight away from St. Frank's, and shove him in an office. He won't go to the 'Varsity, or anything. One bit of a ride, and zip—his career fizzles out. You can be jolly certain that Travers, regardless as he is, won't take a risk of the sort."

Irene was silent. It was just as what Handforth was not looking at her for he would have seen the sudden pallor in her pretty face; he would have seen the startled, frightened look in her eyes. And grateful as she had been to Travers before, her gratitude was intensified a hundredfold.

So he had risked his very career for her sake. To save her from expulsion, he had taken that awful chance! She remembered, now, how eagerly he had asked if Jim Lampson was provided with overalls—and how relieved he had been when he learned that overalls, crash helmet, and goggles were available. Of course! He had relied upon them to disguise him. On a strange machine, in that get up, there was no much risk—

And then Irene remembered the other incident. Forrest! She gave another gasp of dismay.

"What's up?" asked Handforth, glancing at her. "I say, you don't look too well, Renie! Is it the heat?"

"I'm all right," she managed to say in a calm voice. "Oh, look at that boy running!"

She distracted Handforth's attention. She was thinking of Forrest. Forrest had seen—and Forrest must have known that Travers was banned from motor-cycling. That was what Forrest had meant when he had said that he would keep Travers' secret!

And here was Forrest—in the team the very first time he had been in. Two and two generally make four, and Irene was good at arithmetic.

"And yet I can't believe it," she told herself horrified. "Even Forrest wouldn't take such a dreadfully mean advantage as that. Oh, if I had known what it meant to Vivian, I would never have let him take me home!"

She became calmer presently, and she made up her mind to have a private talk—a straight talk—with Vivian Travers later on.

CHAPTER 7.

Rough on Handy—Again!

IT was a disastrous afternoon for Vivian Travers.

Before the Grammarian innings was over, he muffed another easy catch, and a loud groan went up from the spectators. Everybody was astonished. Travers, usually, held a ball like glue. Yet his manner remained just the same; he was cool and smiling and outwardly confident.

Nobody could guess the bitterness of his feelings. He knew how badly he was shaping—and he knew, too, that he was allowing himself to be "rattled" by Forrest's presence in the team. It was a sign of weakness, and Travers was contemptible of weakness in anybody. When he discovered it in his own composition he was positively jarred, and this, as much as anything else, put him off his game.

Again and again he fiercely pulled himself together; and his only consolation was derived from the fact that none of the spectators could see through him.

At last, owing to the clever bowling of Jerry Dodd and Reggie Pitt and Nipper, the Grammarians were dismissed. They had run up the respectable figure of 210. For a junior match this was good.

"Well, we'll manage it, I think, dear old fellows," said Travers, with all his old sang-froid. "They've got one or two hot bowlers, but we needn't be afraid of them."

"They've got men who can catch a ball, too," said De Valerie.

"Meaning, of course, that I can't?" asked Travers, making a wry face. "Well, I deserve it. I made a pretty bad mess of things, eh? Sorry, you chaps. Couldn't seem to concentrate this afternoon."

"Any particular reason?" asked Nipper. "You don't look worried."

"Who could be worried on a glorious afternoon like this?" said Travers. "Hallo! We have fair visitors, I see. I hope you weren't watching, Irene, when I missed that catch?"

"I've seen other boys miss catches," said Irene, laughing.

"Thank you for those kind, comforting words—I can assure you they go straight to my heart," said Travers. "I'm afraid there aren't many customers who'll give me a word of excuse. That's the worst of being a cricket skipper. He's expected to show a good example, and if he doesn't his name is Mud."

Irene had no opportunity of talking privately with Travers now. For, after the briefest of intervals, the Grammarians took the field, and the two opening batsmen of St. Frank's went out. They were Nipper and Reggie Pitt.

Both settled down well, and Travers, who was next man in, already had his pads on, and his bat handy.

The score mounted nicely, Nipper driving particularly well. Pitt was indulging in some perfect late cuts, and again and again the leather went hissing to the boundary, placed with such beautiful accuracy that the fieldsmen had no chance of getting near it.

With the score at fifty-four Pitt was caught in the slips, and Travers went out to take his place. Travers came back a minute later—out for a duck. It was tragic. He had made up his mind to make up for his earlier shortcomings by putting in an extra good "knock." But that fatal lack of concentration, due to his disturbed state of mind, was his undoing.

The ball seemed an easy one, and he hit out at it confidently. But it

proved to be a regular deceiver, and it whipped under his bat, and took his off-stump right out of the ground.

Sadly, Travers returned to the pavilion, and there was an ominous silence. He had failed in the field, and he had failed in the batting. And at last something of his emotions showed on his face. His lips were tight and drawn as he came back, and he had neither smile nor apologetic remark for any of his schoolfellows. With set features he went into the dressing-room and removed his pads.

"Fool—fool—fool!" he told himself bitterly. "You've thrown the game away."

He brooded miserably. With Handforth in the team, there might have been a chance. Handforth was erratic, but he was a slogger. Sometimes he would last for only an over or two; but generally he swiped at everything and knocked up forty or fifty in record time. Handforth's batting was not beautiful, it was not scientific, but it was a joy to watch. And he did generally get the runs.

What would Forrest do—in Handforth's place? Probably nothing.

Travers gripped himself tightly. An overwhelming impulse seized him—to dash up to Forrest and knock him into the middle of next week. Forrest was the cause of all this, confound him! The scheming, unscrupulous cad!

"Steady, old fellow—steady!" muttered Travers. "Only fools lose their heads."

With an iron effort of will he controlled himself; he became level-headed again. The moment of madness was over. There was only one way in which he could defeat Forrest—and that was by taking things calmly, and by doing some scheming of his own. The time wasn't ripe yet.

Jerry Dodd was batting, and putting up a good show. The score mounted rapidly, and a round of applause went up when the hundred was reached. The game began to look promising.

Then Nipper, with the last ball of an

over, was stumped by the alert-witted Grammarian keeper. Nipper had swiped, had missed, and only for a second had he been out of the crease. The balls were whipped off in a flash. "How's that?" yelled the keeper.

"Out!" said the umpire.

There was a hush when the next man went out. He was Bernard Forrest—and it was generally felt that he would fail. He certainly did not look like failing, for his walk was a swagger, and he swung his bat almost contemptuously. Forrest had long awaited this day—when he would play in a big match.

"Swanking blighter!" muttered Handforth, who was watching with glowering eyes.

Forrest was not able to show what he could do yet, for the bowling was at the other end. With the third ball of the over Jerry Dodd was out. Another man came in—another wait for Forrest.

But at last the bowling came to his end, and he knew that everybody was waiting in breathless anticipation.

He played the first ball nicely to the off, and the batsmen ran. Forrest expected two off that hit.

But a Grammarian fieldsman snapped up the ball and returned it like lightning. Forrest only just got to the crease before the stumps were laid low. One run only, and he had lost the bowling.

However, another single was scored, and again Forrest hit out. He was nearly clean-bowled, and if the ball had been true, his stumps would have been spreadeagled, for he missed altogether. The next ball he stopped, and the one after that he got clean away, with a beautiful hit, to the leg boundary. It was a good, well-timed hit, and the spectators cheered more in surprise than delight.

After that, Forrest settled down; his confidence increased. He began batting really well, and, in fact, he looked like staying.

"By Jove, Travers, you knew what you were doing, after all," said Jack

Grey, of the West House. "Forrest's good."

"Don't you think I knew it?" replied Travers calmly.

He was unreasonably angry, within him, because Forrest was making a good show. Yet he knew, at the same time, that the better Forrest played, the more silent would become his—Travers'—critics.

In the end, surprisingly enough, that game proved to be a personal triumph for Bernard Forrest. Perhaps it was just luck. Certainly Forrest knew how to use a bat, and he was keen on cricket. But in this particular match he was not suffering from over-confidence or swelled head; he was out to prove that he was worthy of a place in the team. Other batsmen came and went, but Forrest remained.

In fact, he carried his bat right through, and he scored no less than forty-three. It was he who made the winning hit, not five minutes before the game was due to end.

"Well done, Forrest!"

"Well batted!"

"Hear, hear!"

Forrest, as he heard the shouts and cheers, grinned with arrogant pride. He fairly stalked back to the pavilion.

"Well, what about it now?" he demanded. "Was Travers right, or was he wrong? I saved the game, didn't I?"

"But it's not usual to crow about such things," remarked Reggie Pitt mildly.

"That be hanged for a tale," said Forrest. "I'm good, and I know it."

Travers could say a thing like that and everybody would laugh. But when Forrest said it, it had a different sound. He was insufferably pleased with himself.

Still, the fact could not be denied that he had pulled the game out of the fire. And Travers, instead of facing a storm of criticism, was praised for his sound common-sense. Little did the fellows know just how Bernard Forrest had got his place in the team.

"Well, there's nothing much I can

say," growled Handforth. "I'm jolly glad that Forrest did so well—although I loathe the blighter. It's jolly lucky for him he did do well, or I'd have knocked the stuffing out of him."

"Forget all about it, Handy," advised Church. "Don't chip Travers any more. I dare say he's feeling pretty badly—because he didn't show up too well himself."

"Guilty conscience, I suppose," growled Handforth, much nearer the mark than he believed.

"The game's over, we won, so let's think about tea," said Church. "We're late, anyhow. I expect Travers will put you back in the team next week."

"He'd better!" said Handforth darkly.

Then his face cleared; Irene was in the offing, and he dashed up to her and caught her by the arm.

"Tea in Study D, Renie," he said. "You'll come, won't you?"

"Have you ever known me refuse?" laughed Irene. "You bet I'll come."

"What about Doris and the others?"

"Oh, some of the fellows have claimed them," said Irene. "They wanted me to go, too. But— Well—"

"I twig," grinned Handforth. "Jolly nice of you, old girl. You were waiting for me to invite you, eh? Good egg!" He looked round. "Where's that fat-head, Church?" he went on. "Where's Mac?"

"I think they went indoors a minute ago," said Irene.

"Well, of all the thoughtless fat-heads," stormed Handforth. "They jolly well know that it's tea-time—"

"You never give them credit for thinking, do you?" asked the girl gently.

"Eh?"

"Isn't it obvious that they have hurried in—to get things ready?" she said. "I'm afraid you don't appreciate your chums, Ted. But if you lost them, you'd be like a ship without a rudder."

They strolled from the playing fields, and as they approached the Ancient

House, Handforth asked Irene to wait for a minute whilst he hurried to the school shop to buy some supplies. While Irene was waiting, Bernard Forrest strolled up. He was very resplendent in his white flannels and with his bat tucked under his arm.

Irene, seeing him approach, had turned her back. Her heart was beating rather more rapidly than usual—for she was remembering the incident on Saturday evening. In any case, she detested Forrest, and was never at pains to conceal her dislike.

"Waiting for somebody?" asked Forrest, halting beside her.

In his eyes there was an expression of unsavoury mischief. He had never had the pleasure of Irene Manners' company to tea, and he meant to have that pleasure to-day. There was a key in his possession which would open many locks. He knew it, and he gloated over the fact.

Irene turned, and looked at him indifferently.

"Yes, I'm waiting for Ted—for Handforth," she replied.

"How about having tea in Study A for a change?" suggested Forrest.

"I'm sorry; I have been invited somewhere else."

"Then it's got to be altered," said Forrest smoothly. "I'd take it as a great honour—"

"Really, it's quite impossible," interrupted the girl.

"Impossible?" repeated Forrest. "It's not even improbable. In fact, Irene, old girl, I think you will have tea with me. I insist."

"Don't be so absurd."

"I'm sure Travers would be very upset if you refused any request of mine," continued Forrest, looking her up and down with approval. "Travers and I are getting on very well just now."

"But this has nothing to do with Travers," said the girl, trying to keep her voice steady.

"It might have," he argued. "One never knows. If you don't make your-

self very nice to me, Irene, I might be tempted to let Miss Bond know what you were doing on Saturday evening."

"Oh, you cad!" she cried, her cheeks flaming.

"And that would unfortunately mean the dragging in of Travers' name, too," said Forrest, his voice hardening. "I would be very rough on Travers, you know. His pater would hear all about it, and he would be removed from the school and—"

"Please, please be quiet," pleaded Irene in a low voice. "Oh, why must you talk of it here, in the open? Somebody might hear!"

"I'd much prefer to talk of it in the privacy of my study," said Forrest promptly. "Will you come along?"

She looked at the shop, and her cheeks were still afire. What would Handforth think? Yet, if she refused—

"Vivian!" she exclaimed suddenly.

Travers himself, luckily enough, was just passing. At the sound of her voice charged with anger as it was, he halted. One look was sufficient for him; he guessed exactly what had been passing and his jaw hardened. He strode up and his eyes were smouldering with fury.

"What are you doing, Forrest?" he asked tensely. "If you're attempting to use your infernal blackmailing tactics—"

"Easy—easy!" interrupted Forrest.

"Have you so little thought for Irene's safety that you raise your voice like that? Do you want everybody talking?"

"He wants me to have tea in his study," said the girl, looking appealingly at Travers. "Will you come, too, Vivian? I've promised Ted to have tea in Study D, but I don't know what to do."

"Well, we won't talk here," said Travers quickly. "Come into my study, will you? Potts isn't there—he's having tea in the West House."

"Well, I won't be arbitrary," said Forrest. "Tea in your study will suit

"—If we have the company of the fair Irene. That's the main point." He laughed unpleasantly. "What a shock for Handforth! This is rather rich—in fact, quite funny."

Irene was glad that they succeeded in getting indoors before Handforth emerged from the school shop. They went into Study H, and Travers closed the door and put his back to it.

"Now!" he said ominously.

"My dear chap, don't look like that," said Forrest. "Can't we all be happy?"

For some moments Travers did not trust himself to speak. He knew exactly why Forrest was insisting. It was not so much that he desired Irene's company but that he was wielding the lever which Fate had thrust into his grasp. That he was taking a cowardly, contemptible advantage did not occur to him; he simply knew that he had the power, and he was using it. Once to-day he had "put one over" on Handforth, whom he detested, and here was a better opportunity still. In Forrest's opinion, the situation was quite piquant. Here he was, coolly stealing Handforth's girl chum and making her have tea with him! There was no escape for her—and Handforth would just have to jump it.

"You're not going to do this, Forrest," said Travers, speaking at last. "I'll put up with your dirty tactics as long as you confine them to me, and to me alone. But if you force your rotten orders on Irene——"

"Well?" sneered Forest. "What will you do?"

"I'll give you the hiding of your life, and then you can do your worst."

"Empty talk, old man," said Forrest, with a shrug. "You wouldn't let him do anything like that, would you, Irene? Just for a trifle like this—having tea with me—you wouldn't ruin his career? That's what it'll mean if the pretty little story of Saturday evening comes out."

He was playing one against the other. Irene would agree to his demands—for Travers' sake. Travers would agree—

for Irene's sake. Forrest was beginning thoroughly to enjoy himself. There were endless possibilities unexpectedly revealing themselves.

"You wouldn't tell," said Irene, looking at him with open contempt. "You couldn't be so mean. You only saw us by accident that evening——"

"But accidents have a habit of happening," interrupted Forrest calmly. "And don't let's talk of meanness. Facts are facts. I don't pretend to be a saint, and what you think of me is beside the point. So let's be frank. I've got a hold over both of you, and you daren't defy me."

"If you go too far——" began Travers.

"Give it a rest, old man," smiled Forrest. "This secret is ours; I'm the only fellow in the whole school who knows just what you two were doing last Saturday evening. If I talk there'll be trouble. You were riding a motor-bike against your pater's orders, Travers—and you were out on a forbidden spree, Irene. For one of you it will mean the ruin of a promising career, and for the other it'll mean disgraceful expulsion. But I'm perfectly willing to keep the secret, so let's have no hard words or hard thoughts. Let's all be friendly."

He rose elegantly to his feet.

"So I'm going to repeat my invitation, Irene," he went on. "I want you to come to tea in my study. What about it? Shall we go?"

Irene was looking rather white, and there was a helpless look in her eyes as she glanced at Travers.

"All right," she said briefly.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Forrest. "I thought you'd be reasonable."

"I never had a high opinion of you, Forrest," said Travers deliberately, "but this conduct of yours proves you to be an unspeakable hound——"

"Don't say it," advised Forrest, staring straight at him. "There's a lady present—and if you insult me beyond a certain limit I might be tempted to forget her safety. I wouldn't de-

liberately get her into serious trouble, but if you drive me to it— But let's have no more threats. You're welcome to join the tea-party, Travers. I'm not unreasonable. Shall we let it go at that?"

Vivian Travers nodded.

"You win," he said briefly. "It's not worth fighting over."

But somebody else, as events were soon to prove, had a totally different view on that point.

CHAPTER 8.

Not All Honey!

HANDFORTH was one of the most generous fellows at St. Frank's. He was generous with his money, generous with his advice, generous with his criticism, and generous with his punches. But when it came to entertaining Irene Manners to tea, he always let himself go completely. Mere generosity was no good at such a time; complete lavishness, regardless of expense, was called for.

Behold the burly Edward Oswald, therefore, emerging from the school shop only half visible behind the packages which filled his arms. He apparently had the impression that Irene had been starving for a week or two, for he had bought enough "tuck" for a hungry dozen. But, then, he was always wholesale. Far better have a lot too much, he always declared, than a trifle too little. In addition to ordinary foodstuffs, he had bought a pound box of chocolates and a handsome tin of mixed toffees. For he intended that Irene should go back to her own school not only laden within, but also laden without.

He had spent all his pocket-money, and had seriously mortgaged his next week's supply. But Handforth, like the celebrated Mr. Micawber, was always relying upon something turning up. Unlike Mr. Micawber, he was generally lucky. A doting aunt here, or a generous

uncle there, would send him a useful tip, and such contributions had a habit of rolling in at times of crisis. So Handforth never worried.

Arriving at Study D, he kicked violently on the door, and Church opened it in some alarm.

"My hat! I thought an elephant had got loose!" said Church. "What's this, Handy?"

"Don't stand there gaping, ass," said Handforth. "Take some of the things."

His chums relieved him of his burdens, and he looked round the study in astonishment.

"Where's Irene?" he demanded. "Left her on the steps, but as she wasn't there, I thought she'd come in. What have you chaps done with her?"

"Well, she might be under the table or hiding up the chimney," said McClure. "But as far as we know, we haven't seen her. What the dickens have you bought, Handy? Anybody might think you were laying in for a siege!"

"Just as well to have plenty," said Handforth. "Buck up and get the things dished out on plates. Is the tea made?" He inspected the table critically. "Who told you to put that moth-eaten chunk of cherry cake on the table? Take it away!"

"There's nothing wrong with it," said Church. "It's got that look because we wrapped it in the duster to keep the flies off."

"No wonder I couldn't find the dust this morning, when I wanted to give my shoes a rub," said Handforth. "Put that giddy cake back into the cupboard, we've got something better here. But where the dickens is Irene?" he added, looking round. "I can't understand why she didn't wait for me."

He went to the door, and looked up and down the passage. Then he walked uncertainly towards the lobby. He was feeling a bit uneasy, for he realised with a start that he must have kept the girl waiting for quite a long time. Po

ps Vera Wilkes, the Housemaster's daughter, had carried her off into the private living quarters—

Suddenly he halted. He had heard her voice, and he found himself staring blankly at the door of Study A. But the thing was ridiculous— Irene couldn't really be in Bernard Forrest's study—

But it was a point which could be quickly settled, and Handforth charged to the room like an avalanche.

He came to a halt with an expression of amazement on his face. His jaw positively sagged. Irene was sitting in Forrest's easy chair, Travers sat opposite, and Forrest himself was busily setting the table.

"Want anything?" asked Forrest, looking up.

Handforth looked from one to another, tongue-tied.

"Because, if not, you're in the way," went on Forrest. "I hope you're not going to be noisy in front of a lady?"

"I'm sorry, Ted—" began Irene, her face flushed, and hardly daring to meet his gaze.

"But—but I don't understand," ejaculated Handforth. "What the dickens are you doing here, Renie?"

"Can't you see what she's doing?" said Forrest, before the girl could answer. "You're not blind, are you? She's my guest, and she's staying here for tea."

There was positive malevolence in Forrest's tone and look, and his grin was one of triumph.

"You're mad!" said Handforth quickly. "I invited Irene to tea in Study D—and she accepted. Isn't that right, Renie?"

He appealed to her confidently, and the girl longed for the floor to open and swallow her up.

"Well, you see, Ted, I thought— I mean—" She paused, confused. Forrest wanted me— Oh, dear! Please don't be cross, Ted."

"No, don't be cross, Ted," mimicked Forrest, with relish. "You must always

understand, old man, that it is a lady's privilege to change her mind. You may have invited her to tea, but she's having tea here—with me."

"Afraid you'll have to accept it, dear old fellow," said Travers gently.

Handforth had grown redder and redder, and now, abruptly, he exploded.

"Oh, so that's it!" he roared. "A plot against me, eh? I'm dropped out of the eleven and I'm only dirt! Forrest saves the game, and he's a conquering hero!"

"But, Ted, you don't understand," cried Irene, in despair.

Handforth did not even hear her.

"You tricky rotter, Travers!" he shouted. "You give my place in the eleven to Forrest, and now you wangle things so that Irene—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Travers mildly. "I plead guilty to dropping you out of the team; but don't blame me for this. Forrest invited Irene for tea. I had no hand in it at all. If you don't believe me, ask him."

"He's quite right," said Forrest, nodding. "I invited her, and she accepted. Satisfied?"

"No, I'm not satisfied!" bellowed Handforth. "You—you barefaced cad! Do you think I'm going to let you pinch my guest like this?"

"Oh, Ted, please be a sport," urged Irene, dreading that Forrest would be driven to extremes, and fearing that Travers would be the sufferer. "It's only a trifle. I'll come to your study afterwards. I can't explain, but—"

"There's no reason why you should explain, Irene," interrupted Forrest, his tone becoming ugly. "Handforth, clear out! I'm fed up with this disturbance. If you can't behave better than a hooligan— Here, what the— Keep your hands off me, you fool!"

Crash!

Handforth was never much of a fellow to argue; he much preferred to act. His famous right, swinging round, caught Bernard Forrest on the point of the chin, and the elegant Removite went hurtling backwards over a chair. He

grabbed at the tablecloth, and there was a terrific din of falling and breaking crockery.

"Life has its sweet moments, after all," said Travers happily.

"Oh, Ted!" breathed Irene.

Springing to her feet, she stood with flushed face and eager, sparkling eyes. In her expression of consternation was mingled admiration and joy. It was plain that she did not know whether to be happy or worried. Forrest was getting no more than he deserved—but what would his reaction be?

"Get up, you rotter!" panted Handforth, glaring. "So you'd pinch my girl friend, would you? By George! Get up and fight, you snake in the grass!"

Forrest, gasping, his brain reeling, sat up amid the broken crockery.

"You mad lunatic!" he grated savagely. "You don't understand! If I like, I can get Irene——"

He was going to say "sacked," but he never had the opportunity. Handforth, leaping forward, grabbed hold of him by the shirt and yanked him to his feet.

"Now you'll fight, or I'll biff you as you stand!" he said fiercely.

"Hang you!" snarled Forrest, lashing out wildly.

The next moment they were at it hammer and tongs—for Forrest, cad though he was, did not lack courage or fighting ability. A sudden ferocious determination gripped him. In the presence of Irene he would knock Handforth cold. Unfortunately for him, Handforth had very similar ideas—but the other way about.

"I think," murmured Travers, "we'd better give them some elbow room, old girl."

He reached for the door, deftly turned the handle, and a moment later Irene found herself out in the passage. Travers closed the door and put his back to it.

"A painful business," he commented, regarding her with a serene smile. "Particularly painful, I imagine, for Forrest."

"Oh, Vivian, I'm scared," she whispered, gripping his arm.

"Why should you be scared? Not if you were Forrest——"

"But he'll talk," she said in alarm.

"Well, we can't help that," said Travers, with a shrug. "It's a free country, and free speech is tolerated——"

"Oh, Vivian, how can you be calm?" she asked. "You know what mean! He'll talk about us! Then your father will get to know, and you'll be taken away from the school——"

"You're not considering yourself," said Travers. "If I get it in the neck, Irene, you'll get it in exactly the same place. But don't worry. Wait until Handforth has had his fling, and I'll do the rest. Somehow I think Forrest will be reasonable."

"Oh, listen!" whispered the girl.

From within Study A came ominous sounds—thuds, yells, gasps, thumps, crashes.

"The good work goes well," Travers, nodding. "It's a pity Handy is so noisy—— By Sam! And here comes somebody who may make awkward inquiries."

It was Biggleswade of the Sixth, he was looking suspicious. Not without reason, for the sounds of battle were clearly audible right down the Rectory passage. Biggleswade approached briskly.

"I've got it!" said Travers, in a voice. "This is the one you mean, is it?"

He burst into song, striking attitudes and taking care to remain fixed planted before the door of Study A. His voice rang out lustily, and he was concerned, apparently, on the subject of who walked in when he walked. Irene took her cue like a sportsman and she clapped her hands and cheered aloud with encouragement—just to add to the general din.

Biggleswade coughed as he drew back. He was a lean, lanky prefect, with a keen sense of humour. Moreover

was intelligent. It took him about three-fifths of a second to grasp the situation.

"Rotten, Travers," he said severely. "That voice of yours wants oiling. If you must howl like a starving wolf, I'm clearing out."

"Who walks in when I walk out?" sang Travers. "Hi-de-hi, hi-de-ho! Vo-de-o-do, vo-de-o-do!"

Biggleswade fled.

"An obliging chap, Biggy," chuckled Travers. "As long as you give him a reasonable excuse he'll be as blind as a bat and as deaf as a dodo."

"They're still at it," said Irene, glancing apprehensively at the door behind Travers.

"Give them time, old girl," he replied. "I think you'd better trot along to Study D and help Church and McClure with the tea things. I'll send Handy along in a few minutes."

"Oh, but Forrest will insist on my having tea with him."

"Innocent child!" said Travers kindly. "By the time Handy has finished with Forrest, he'll be in such a condition that he won't want to show himself in public for many painful, weary hours. Forrest, I mean. Take it from me, Irene, everything's all right. I dare say he is realising by this time that being an amateur blackmailer is not all honey."

She paused only a moment.

"Ted told me about your father's dreadful threat," she murmured. "It was wonderful for you to help me as you did last Saturday, Vivian—and I won't forget it. It's just our awful luck that Forrest happened to see us."

"Leave Forest to me," said Travers. "My policy is to give him rope—and if he has enough of it—Well, you know the rest."

She left without another word, and in Study D she found the table groaning under an abundance of good things. Church was toasting some muffins, and McClure was making the tea.

"Handy's gone out to look for you,"

said Church, giving her a straight look. "What's all that din down the passage?"

"I think Ted's having an—an argument with somebody," said the girl.

"Travers?" asked Church and McClure, in one voice.

"Oh, no," she replied. "Not Travers. Forrest."

"That's all right, then," said Church, with relief. "I suppose Forrest swanked about his cricket, eh? Just like Handy to go for him bald-headed. Well, a sloshing will do him good."

Never for an instant were Church and McClure in doubt as to the outcome of the battle. They did not even go out into the passage to make personal inquiries. They dismissed the matter as trivial, and went on with their preparations for tea. And Irene, who insisted on helping inwardly prayed that Forrest, after his licking, would keep his tongue still. Knowing him as she did—knowing him now better than ever—she had every reason to be troubled by grave doubts.

Vivian Travers, very happy, paced up and down outside Study A and whistled. Fortunately, nobody else had come along to make inquiries. Thuds and crashes and other commotions were commonplace enough in the Remove passage, and its normal occupants never took much notice. It wasn't likely that another prefect would come along. Besides, the ominous sounds from within Study A were growing less and less. Finally, they ceased altogether, and a grim, suggestive silence reigned.

Travers opened the door, glanced in, and nodded contentedly.

"Good work!" he commented.

The table was upside down; two of the chairs were smashed. Books from the bookcase were strewn in all directions. Handforth sat on the edge of a chair with a dazed but happy look on his face. His left eye was puffy, his right ear was lopsided, and blood was smeared on his forehead and upper lip and chin. His clothing was more or

less in rags. And, in fact, he was scarcely more than half-dressed. In all the circumstances, it was just as well that Irene had departed from this Berserk scene.

"One of your best jobs, Handy," said Travers approvingly. "I notice that you have strewn Forrest all over the room. Do you think he'll live? Or is he dead already?"

It was a superfluous question. Bernard Forrest proved that he was alive, because he was groaning. He was lying flat on his back, spread-eagled, and he was far less presentable than Handforth. Scarcely any shirt was left on his shoulders, and his face looked as though he had been run into by a tramcar.

"By George!" breathed Handforth, his voice hoarse and strained. "He may be a rotter, but he can take his medicine!"

"Apparently, he can administer it, too."

"Yes, I'll give him his due," admitted Handforth. "He gave me a real fight. He's a dirty dog, all the same. If he had used his fists all the time I should have finished him long before this."

"You're not telling me that he kicked?" asked Travers shocked.

"He kicked when he got the chance," growled Handforth. "He grabbed a broken chair, too, and tried to whack me over the head. In fact, he did whack me over the head," he added, feeling with tender feelings, a rapidly growing bump. "It's a wonder he didn't try to bite me!"

"He must have thought it was an exhibition of all-in wrestling," said Travers. "Well, well! It's a good thing your head is so hard, old man. Better buzz upstairs and get yourself cleaned. Irene's waiting in Study D—and tea's all ready."

Handforth, still a bit dazed, jumped to his feet.

"By George, yes!" he said. "I'd forgotten for a minute." He looked at Travers suspiciously. "I suppose you

didn't have any hand in this rotten business?" he went on, clenching his fists, and advancing threateningly. "You didn't put Forrest up to this shabby trick?"

Travers grinned.

"Not guilty," he replied. "Forrest thought of it all by himself. In any case you're not thinking of starting another scrap, are you? What a glutton for punishment! Run along, old fellow, and remove the traces."

Handforth looked on the floor.

"Never mind him," said Travers reading his thoughts. "I'll attend the wounded."

Handforth hurried out, and, without any further ado, Travers hoisted Forrest into the easy chair, and then proceeded to render first aid.

He was badly knocked about—worse than Handforth—but after a few minutes he showed signs of rapid recovery. For Travers was drastic. That happened to be a jug of cold water on the side table, which, curiously enough, had not been upset, and Travers swamped Forrest's head and face with the entire contents.

"Oooh—aaaaaah—eccccch!" gasped the wounded.

"Take it easy, old man," said Travers. "The cold water will do you good. Here's a piece of somebody's shirt."

Forrest dabbed his face, and, his recovery now being almost complete, he gazed round with savage rage.

"Where is he?" he demanded fiercely.

"Handforth? Gone upstairs to clean up," said Travers. "You'd better do the same. If a prefect or a master spots you in this condition——"

"Where's Irene?"

"Oh, she went along to Study D—tea, as originally arranged."

"I won't have it!" panted Forrest leaping to his feet, his eyes blazing dangerously. "She's going to have tea with this study——"

"Now, be reasonable," interrupted Travers. "How can you ask any lad to tea in such a shambles as this? Look at yourself in the mirror, my dear For-

est! Having done so, kindly tell me if you can worthily act as host at a tea party."

Forrest reeled across to the mirror, gazed at himself and jumped nearly a foot into the air.

"By gad!" he said hoarsely. "Who—who is it?"

"I'm afraid it's you—but I don't wonder you can't recognise yourself," said Travers. "What you've got to do, Forrest, is to accept the situation calmly."

"I'll accept nothing!" snarled Forrest, glaring. "Why didn't you drag the fool off?"

"And spoil the fight? What do you make me for?"

"I'll make you suffer for this, Travers!" said Forrest venomously. "You did nothing to help me—and everything to hinder me! Well, I'll have my revenge. I'll go out of here, and I'll tell everything I know. I'll write to your pater, and I'll tell Miss Bond about Irene. I'll get you removed from St. Frank's, and I'll get Irene sacked from the Moor View."

"And then?" asked Travers calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"Have you considered your own awful fate?"

"I don't know what you're talking about! What can happen to me?"

"Lots," said Travers happily. "Plenty can happen to you, my poor friend. I am willing to admit that you can, by talking, get me into trouble with my pater—and that means removal from St. Frank's. You might even get Irene expelled from her own school. That's one side of the story. But what of the other side?"

"There is no other side, confound you!"

"No! Are you sure?" said Travers. "Let me tell you something. If you spill the beans, everything will come out. You understand, I hope? Everything."

"Well?"

"The Remove will know exactly how you conducted yourself in this sordid

business," continued Travers. "The Remove will know you got your place in the cricket eleven by threatening me—in short, by a method of blackmail. The Remove will also know that you induced Irene to accept your invitation by similar coercion. If one fact comes out, Forrest, all the facts must come out. That's an undeniable statement. And how do you think you will fare?"

Forrest looked startled.

"Shall I hazard a guess?" went on Travers. "The Remove will slaughter you. To begin with, you will probably be kicked round the Triangle, after which you will be booted to the village and back. Then you'll be sent to Coventry for the remainder of the term. Decent fellows will wilt at the sight of you, they will edge away from your person as they might from a leper. Your name will not only be Mud, but Dirty Mud."

Forrest realised that Travers was speaking the literal truth, and his rage evaporated; he even began to look scared.

"So if Irene and I find trouble, you will also find trouble," said Travers. "Don't you think it better, all things considered, to leave matters just as they are? It will be much more peaceful all round. Think it over, my battered friend. Weigh the points, and do not be hasty."

With a nod, Vivian Travers strolled out of the study, and Forrest sat there, glowering with helpless fury. He was rather dismayed by the discovery that the sword he held was provided with two edges—one for his victims, and one for himself!

CHAPTER 5.

A Present from Pater!

IT was fortunate that Edward Oswald Handforth was not much addicted to the habit of thinking. Otherwise, he might have wondered. Having licked Forrest, he was content—more particularly as he entertained Irene to tea, after all.

Bernard Forrest, having thought

things over, came to the conclusion that Travers was right, and he kept a still tongue in his head.

Two or three days later he was glad of this for he had not only recovered from his injuries, but he succeeded in borrowing a fiver from Travers with little or no difficulty. The mere hint of a threat had been sufficient. He came to the conclusion that it would be wiser to use his power in a diplomatic way. By goading Travers unduly he would only kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

He realised, now, that it had been a mistake to use force with Irene Manners. For by doing so he had incurred the enmity of Handforth—and Handforth, knowing nothing of the issues, had simply sailed in with both fists. Far better then, to confine his attentions to Travers, and to Travers alone.

The fiver had come off nicely, and Forrest had a mental vista of many more "touches" in the future. Travers could not refuse. For always there was the thought in his mind that if he jibbed, Irene would be in danger. For Irene's sake, if not for his own, he must obey his master.

Morning lessons were over that day, and as Travers sallied forth into the sunny Triangle he found Tubbs, the Ancient House page-boy, waiting with a stranger.

"Gent come to see you, Master Travers," said Tubbs. "Been waiting nearly half an hour."

"I regret the delay, my dear sir," said Travers politely. "You will doubtless understand the pressure of work, entirely beyond my own control, detained me?"

The stranger laughed.

"Yes, I gathered as much," he said, as he shook hands. "My name is William Mowbray, of the firm of Carter, Williamson & Co., Ltd."

"Solicitors?" asked Travers, with interest. "Have I come into a fortune, or something?"

Mr. Mowbray, who was an active young man, chuckled.

"Hardly that," he replied. "I am a firm dealer in boat construction. I have been instructed by your father, Mr. Robert Travers, to make delivery of the River Princess. Will you call along to the river?"

"I haven't the faintest idea of what you're talking about, but let's go," said Travers. "Careless of my father not tell me that he was sending a process down on a visit?"

"I think he meant it to be a little surprise for you," said Mr. Mowbray.

Interested spectators, including Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Handforth and Jimmy Potts, had heard every word of the conversation. So when Vivian Travers strolled towards the river with a stranger, there was a considerable escort. Curiosity ran high. Mr. Removites and Fourth Formers, seeing something unusual, joined the party.

The River Stowe, placid and cool, an excellent navigable stream—flowing just beyond the limits of the St. Frank playing fields. There were smart boat houses here, to say nothing of dressing rooms for the use of bathers.

"By George!" exclaimed Handforth as they drew near. "Look at that spanking new launch!"

The vessel was a newcomer in the stream—an unusually roomy motor launch, gleaming and shimmering in blue and white paintwork, and leather cushioned seats and a big steering wheel. Amidships arose the side windows and skylight of an ample cabin or saloon, and aft there was an open deck, surrounded by gleaming, chromium rails, with a dazzlingly white awning overhead.

"My only hat!" said Nipper. "Some baby!"

They gathered on the bank in an admiring crowd, gazing upon this elegant and luxurious pleasure craft.

"So this is the River Princess," said Travers. "Very nice, Mr. Mowbray, very charming, in fact. But where do I come in?"

"She's yours!" smiled Mr. Mowbray.

"Mine!"

"From stern to stern," said the other. "You see, I'm a motor engineer, and this is part of my work for the firm to make delivery of new launches. If you will come aboard I will give you all the necessary instructions for running her, and I'd like you to sign the receipt."

Even the imperturbable Travers was startled out of his habitual sang-froid.

"But, dash it, there must be some mistake," he protested. "Even my father wouldn't— Let's have a look at those papers," he added. "Well, well! So it's really true? Gather round, Romans and countrymen, and gaze upon my latest possession."

"Lucky boulder!" said Jimmy Potts enviously.

"I say, Travers, take us for a spin!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Be a sport, Travers!"

"All in good time," said Travers calmly. "There's no rush. Don't all rowd aboard at once, or you'll sink her."

He was still startled. This spanking line river launch must have cost a big pile of money. True, his father was rich, and he was generous; but such a present as this was well-nigh unbelievable. Travers could have had a dozen motor-cycles at less cost.

He remembered his father's offer—to provide him with a river launch. He remembered, too, that he had declined the offer. Apparently, his father had ignored the refusal—and here was the launch—his own entire property.

"Well, well," murmured Travers, and his eyes were reflective.

He imagined that his father, on second thoughts, had somewhat repented his harsh decree. And by way of compensation, he had bought this wonderful river-boat for his son.

"She's very easy to navigate," Mr. Mowbray was saying. "In fact, we claim her to be absolutely fool-proof."

"Then even Handforth could handle her?" said Travers cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you'll come with me into the cock-

pit, I will show you the main controls," continued Mr. Mowbray. "The engine, a powerful six-cylinder unit, is started up in the same way as a car. There is really nothing to go wrong. She's quiet, vibrationless, and no launch on the market can compare with her for comfort and luxury."

"Speedy?" asked Travers.

"Well, no," said the other. "Such launches as this are not built for speed."

"I thought so," said Travers sadly. "Undoubtedly handsome as she is, I would willingly exchange her for one of those snappy speedcraft with a demon motor glued on to the stern. However, why should I grumble?"

"Why, indeed?" said the surprised Mr. Mowbray. "Not many schoolboys are as lucky as you."

"Lucky!" said Travers, with a shake of his head. "You don't know the half of it!"

He climbed into the cockpit and Mr. Mowbray prepared to give a demonstration. Other juniors invaded the saloon, admiring the luxurious appointments. Still more piled upon the aft deck—until, indeed, the River Princess was settling down in the water. Mr. Mowbray was obliged to order some of the boys ashore.

However, he started off presently, with a good load; and the demonstration was a complete success. At full speed, the launch glided sedately down the reaches of the Stowe; she negotiated the curves perfectly, and Travers, on the way back, took the wheel, and he found no difficulty in controlling her.

"There is always the danger, of course, of falling asleep at the wheel," he commented dryly. "The general air of tranquil leisureliness is conducive to slumber. I really think she ought to be called the Sleepy Snail."

Mr. Mowbray, knowing nothing of Travers' past record as a high-speed merchant, failed to appreciate the pleasantry—tinged, as it was, with a certain bitterness. He privately considered that Travers was an ungrateful

young blighter. However, business etiquette forbade him to give expression to his thoughts. Having made delivery, and having obtained Vivian Travers' signature, his work was done, and he took his departure.

"There's no denying that the pater is a brick," said Travers, later. "But if he thinks he can square me with this disguised barge he's barking up the wrong tree. Still, it's a good sign. He's relenting. Give him time, and he'll have his eyes fully opened to the error of his ways."

"You ought to be boiled for saying a thing like that, Travers," declared Nipper. "Your craving for speed is idiotic. Half the fellows at St. Frank's would give their ears for a boat like this."

There were many eager applications for a cruise, and it seemed that Travers would be kept busy with his new possession later in the day—when school work was over.

Travers himself was the only fellow whose interest was lukewarm. The luxury and comfort of the River Princess impressed him not at all; the craft's lack of speed rendered it, in his view, a total loss. Unless you could get a thrill out of a thing it was more or less beneath contempt.

"Well, Travers, you've got to admit that life has its compensations," said Jimmy Potts, his study-mate. "Your pater came down heavy—but now you're better off than ever. I can't understand why you're not singing with joy. That boat is worth fifty motor-bikes."

Travers was looking thoughtful.

"I wonder if it would be possible to strip her down and get rid of all that unnecessary junk amidships," he said reflectively. "Then we can hot up the engine, fit a super-charger, and fix a bigger propeller, perhaps. By Samson! It's worth thinking about, Jimmy."

Jimmy Potts gave it up.

"You're hopeless," he said, in despair.

Rain during the afternoon, unexpected and unwelcome, made cricket

practice impossible. The rain stopped, and the sun even came out, but the ground was so wet that nobody ventured out to the playing fields.

Bernard Forrest, looking very pleased with himself, took Travers aside.

"I've been thinking," he said genially.

"Very unwise," said Travers. "You shouldn't strain yourself."

"We're going for a cruise in your new launch, Travers."

"We? Who's 'we'?"

"Just a little select party of us," replied Forrest. "At least, you'll go for the cruise alone—and we'll meet you somewhere up the river. Gulliver, Bell Grayson, Shaw, and myself."

"Rotters, one and all," commented Travers.

Forrest coloured.

"You'd better be careful—" he began.

"Why should I be careful," interrupted Travers. "You're not denying that you're a rotter, are you, Forrest? A fellow who indulges in blackmail can't afford to have a thin skin. But we'll let it pass. What's the object of this cruise?"

"Well, I was having a look over the launch's saloon," said Forrest. "It's cosy, private, and comfortable. What better place for a little flutter? It's always difficult for us to get a decent game of nap, or poker. If we have a party in the study, there's always the chance of a prefect nosing it—and we can never smoke comfortably. If we go out into the woods, it's just as bad. There's a certain amount of privacy, yes, but the wind is generally a bother, and you get ants all over you."

"Go on," said Travers.

"This new launch of yours has solved a long-standing problem," said Forrest grinning. "You take her up the river, tuck her into a calm backwater, and there you are! In that luxurious saloon we can enjoy a ripping game, smoke to our heart's content, and have complete peace of mind."

"Confound you, Forrest, I won't

agree," said Travers hotly. "I'm not going to have you smoky rotters making that comfortable saloon into a gambling den."

"No?" sneered Forrest. "I've known you to play cards for money, and you smoke as many cigarettes as I do."

"Since I've been cricket skipper I've cut cigarettes out," retorted Travers. "As for gambling, I'm no saint—and I'm no hypocrite, either. But there's a place for everything, and I don't see why you should befoul my launch—"

"Not going to kick, are you?" demanded Forrest nastily. "You know what'll happen if you refuse? You'd better understand that you are still under my thumb. One word from me—"

"Don't say it," interrupted Travers. "We've been over it before, and it's becoming monotonous. I suppose you win, as usual?"

Forrest grinned, and without another word Travers walked off, his eyes hard, his lips set.

CHAPTER 10.

Pycraft on the Prowl.

JIMMY POTTS, who knew most of his study-mate's moods, noticed a subtle difference in Travers during tea. He talked little, but when he did talk his remarks were more than usually cynical.

"Anybody might think you'd had bad news to-day, instead of becoming the owner of a spanking river yacht," said the schoolboy-baronet, eyeing his companion curiously. "What the dickens is the matter with you, Travers?"

"I want to kick somebody—hard," replied Travers. "Anybody will do. I'm not particular. Silly, isn't it, but I just feel that way."

"Because your pater made you a present of that launch?" asked Jimmy, staring. "Well, my goodness! You want a lot of pleasing, I must say! I suppose you're peeved because you can't get any speed out of the boat."

"We'll let it go at that," said Travers.

He was feeling really bad about Bernard Forrest's bare-faced confiscation of the "River Princess." For that is what it virtually amounted to. Travers was mad at the thought of Forrest & Co. converting the luxury cabin into a smoking and gambling-den.

When he got down to the river he was aware that sundry groups of juniors had spotted him, and were following. He made greater haste, for it was necessary for him to cruise up the river alone.

He grudgingly admired Forrest's cunning in making that arrangement. If they had all started off in the launch together, many shrewd fellows would have suspected their purpose. Forrest knew this, and he had guarded against it.

A weedy, unpleasant-looking man was standing on the river-bank, inspecting the launch through his glasses, as Travers approached. He was dressed in flannel trousers and a shabby sports coat, and one of last year's straw hats reposed on his head. This gentleman was none other than Mr. Horace Pycraft, the much-hated master of the Fourth Form.

"Ah, Travers!" said Mr. Pycraft. "Allow me to congratulate you on your new—er—toy! You are a remarkably lucky young fellow, eh?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Indeed, you only suppose so?" said Mr. Pycraft. "H'm! I am afraid you are unappreciative of your father's generosity."

"Excuse me, sir," said Travers, pushing past. "You don't mind if I go aboard, do you?"

He was quite certain that Mr. Pycraft was angling for a cruise. Mr. Pycraft was a first-class toady, and an unpleasant gentleman in general. It was one of his favourite recreations to prowl about, nosing here and nosing there, with the deliberate idea of dropping on fellows who were doing things they shouldn't do. The more boys he could

get into trouble, the better Mr. Pycraft liked it. In the Fourth, privately, he was known as the Great Pest.

"Er—going up the river, Travers?" asked Mr. Pycraft, in a careless voice.

Travers considered him. There was a wicked look in the Removite's eyes. He regarded sneaking as contemptible, but there is an exception to every rule. Moreover, a mere hint to Mr. Pycraft would be enough—

"Sorry, sir, I can't invite you," said Travers. "I'm going up the river alone."

"Really! Isn't that somewhat selfish?"

Travers looked up the river with a guilty, scared look on his face—a look which Mr. Pycraft duly noted.

"I've arranged to meet some pals up the river, sir," said Travers hurriedly. "No, I mean—" He appeared confused. "The fact is, sir, I want to get the hang of the steering before I take anybody else for a run."

He was in the cockpit now, and he pressed the self-starter. The engine purred with beautiful smoothness.

"Hi, wait a minute, Travers!" yelled Armstrong, of the East House Fourth, as he came running up. "Give us a run!"

"Be a sport, Travers!" said Buster Boots.

Others were coming now, and some of them were attempting to board. But deftly Travers had cast off the moorings, and the launch was now clear of the bank.

"What's the idea?" asked Dick Goodwin, of the West House Remove. "Aren't you going to give us a ride?"

"Don't be funny, Travers!" said Harry Gresham.

Travers waved to them.

"Sorry, you chaps," he said. "I've arranged—I mean, I'm going on this cruise alone."

"How long will you be?"

"Shan't be back until calling-over," sang out Travers, as he slipped in the clutch and the propeller began to

revolve. "Perhaps I'll give some of you chaps a run to-morrow."

"Why, you rotter, you're kidding, aren't you?" roared Boots. "What are you going to do up the river for a couple of hours? What game have you got on?"

"Dry up, you idiot!" called Travers warningly.

He went up the river in a happy frame of mind. Undeniably, he had not said anything which could be characterised as sneaking, yet he had sown some very fertile seeds in Mr. Pycraft's suspicious mind.

"It is my duty to look further into this," Mr. Pycraft told himself. "What is Travers going up the river alone? Who are these companions he is to meet? Dear me! The whole affair has an uncommonly ugly aspect!"

He was annoyed with Travers for refusing to give him a run. He felt he had been slighted. His curiosity was aroused, and he watched the progress of the launch with an eager, unpleasant gleam in his eyes.

He took the trail with the agility of a Red Indian on the warpath.

"Think it'll be safe?" asked Grayson of the Fifth.

"Safe as a bank," replied Bernard Forrest confidently. "My dear chap, we've never had a really safe retreat where we could have a bit of a flutter. But this launch of Travers' is the exact thing. Here we are, miles from anywhere, without a house in sight, in a secluded backwater, and soon we shall be sitting on luxury seats round a polished walnut table."

"Yes, if Travers comes," said Gulliver dubiously.

"He'll come," said Forrest.

"Pretty sure of it, aren't you?" asked Bell, staring. "Why should Travers be so obliging? You seem to be getting on pretty well with him these days. You've got him to get you a place in the eleven, and—"

"Yes, we understand one another

very nicely," interrupted Bernard Forrest, with a grin. "But don't ask questions, my dear chap. Be satisfied that things are as they are."

There were five of them standing by the river bank in this lonely, secluded backwater, at the very top of a long, placid reach of the Stowe. Harold Grayson, the leader of everything unpleasant in the Fifth, was accompanied by his bosom pal, Frederick Shaw. Grayson was a rotter, and he looked a rotter, but Shaw was very much of a dandy, and deceptive in his appearance. Until people got to know him, they did not realise that his nature was mean and unscrupulous. Gulliver and Bell, of course, were birds of Forrest's feather.

"By gad! Here she comes!" exclaimed Bell suddenly.

"Didn't I tell you?" grinned Forrest.

The launch looked splendid as she came gliding serenely up the river. The group on the bank waved and shouted, and Travers obediently directed the River Princess into the backwater, edged her close against the bank, and shut off the engine. Grayson and Gulliver caught the mooring-ropes and made fast.

"Good man!" said Forrest, as he jumped aboard. "Only a minute or two behind time. We've got practically two hours before we need go back. Come on, you fellows."

"Anybody might think the launch was yours," said Shaw.

"Travers doesn't mind," retorted Forrest, with a chuckle. "We're like brothers nowadays."

No sooner had they got into the comfortable saloon, with its airy skylight, than cigarette packets came out and they all lit up. Then cards and money appeared on the table, and the cads of St. Frank's settled themselves down to an enjoyable game. Never before had they felt so safe.

"This is what I call the real thing," exclaimed Forrest. "Come on, Travers. Here's a seat for you."

"Much obliged," said Travers, who was in the doorway.

"Come and make yourself comfortable, old man. After all, it's your boat," continued Forrest. "Jolly decent of you to fall in with our plans like this. What shall we play? As there are half a dozen of us, it had better be poker."

"Leave me out," said Travers.

"What! Aren't you going to play?"

"No."

"But why not?"

"I hate to give offence, but I'm rather particular with whom I play," replied Travers bluntly. "In any case, this sort of thing is a fool's game, at the best."

"Pretty outspoken, aren't you?" demanded Shaw, with a stare.

"What if I am? I've a right to my own opinion," said Travers. "How long are you going to be at this rot? I'll go for a stroll—"

"Don't be an idiot!" interrupted Forrest. "If you don't want to play, come and sit down and have a cigarette—and watch us."

"I'm not smoking these days, and I don't want to be in this murky atmosphere," answered Travers. "I'll come back later."

Without another word he turned and closed the door. The saloon was already blue with smoke, and when Travers glanced back, after getting ashore, he saw that a smoky haze was rising from the launch's skylight. That sight rather pleased him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Horace Pycraft, following the towpath, had made good progress. It was a delightful evening now, with the sun shining brightly, and with the air full of a fresh, clean smell of damp earth. On all sides the fields and meadows were looking green and refreshed. Peace lay over the countryside.

Mr. Pycraft, however, was not thinking of nature. The landscape had no appeal for him. He was remembering Travers' words; Travers had taken the launch up the river to meet some

"pals." For what purpose? Where was the launch now?

The very secretiveness of the expedition—so skilfully indicated by Travers—had aroused deep suspicions in the Form-master's mind.

A murmur of satisfaction escaped him when, after walking two or three miles he espied the gleaming new launch tucked away amid the willows of a secluded backwater. The trees formed an almost complete screen, and if Mr. Pycraft had not been looking for the boat, he might easily have missed it.

He approached cautiously, dodging from cover to cover, for now he was more than ever convinced that something wicked was going on aboard. It was one of Mr. Pycraft's delights to catch his victims redhanded. It was always easy to explain later that he had "happened to be passing." Everybody knew that he spied deliberately, but he laboured under the delusion that these activities of his were conducted with Sexton Blake-like astuteness.

At the present moment he had no suspicion that two amused eyes were watching him from the cover of a distant tree. Vivian Travers was beginning to enjoy himself. He had waited behind that tree, confident that Mr. Pycraft would come. Well, here he was, and his antics were comic.

"Go it, Pieface!" murmured Travers. "You'll get a nice bag this time."

He was taking a risk, of course. The launch was his, but he could truthfully say that he was not present at the time of the gamble. And because of that fact he could not be involved. But for the others it would mean a flogging, at the very least, and Travers had long since come to the conclusion that a flogging would do them no harm at all. With luck, they might even be sacked.

And nearer and nearer crept Mr. Pycraft, and now his eyes were positively aglow with certainty. In the still evening air he could see the blue, hazy smoke arising from the open skylight of the launch.

"Ah, just as I thought—just as suspected!" he murmured vindictively. "Travers and his friends—smoking! This is what Travers does with his father's gift! Disgusting—disgraceful! It is very lucky I—er—happened to stroll this way!"

He even tried to deceive himself—and generally succeeded. Pushing his way through the willows which bordered the bank, however, he was unlucky enough to tread on a dead tree branch, half hidden in the grass. It snapped with a report like a pistol shot, and Mr. Pycraft, in his surprise, uttered a startled ejaculation.

By a sheer fluke it happened that the gamblers within the saloon were at a tense moment of the game, and a strained silence reigned. There was a good deal of money on the table, and Bell and Shaw had dropped out. They had thrown their cards in. Forrest and Grayson and Gulliver, each holding good hands, had "raised" one another again and again. They were waiting for Grayson, amid complete silence when they heard the snapping twig and the gasped ejaculation. In the still evening air the sounds came to them with astonishing clarity.

They forgot their cards; they stared at one another blankly.

"Pycraft!" hissed Shaw. "I'd know his voice in a million!"

Grayson and Shaw lived in the East House, and so did Mr. Pycraft. Therefore they knew him very well indeed. Shaw leapt up and peered through one of the windows. The next second he dodged.

"Yes, he's there—on the bank!" he panted. "He's coming aboard!"

"The sneaking, spying blighter!" hissed Grayson. "What are we going to do? He'll catch us—"

"There's only one chance for us," muttered Forrest. "It's Travers' boat, so he'll have to take the rap. If we can avoid Pycraft spotting us, we'll be safe. Travers won't give our names."

"But it's impossible!" gasped Bell.

shivering. "Listen! Pycraft's coming aboard!"

"Follow me!" breathed Forrest.

He opened the door a trifle. It led straight out on to the deck, and Mr. Horace Pycraft had just jumped aboard, a rather daring feat for him to perform, for the boat was two or three feet from the bank.

Bending low down, Bernard Forrest charged. Mr. Pycraft saw him, but he had no time to get out of the way. He saw no face, nothing by which he could identify the boy. The next second Forrest's head had butted him fairly and squarely in the stomach, and with a gurgling howl of agony and terror Mr. Pycraft went backwards over the side.

Splaaaaaash!

As he struck the water and went under, five desperate figures leapt for the bank, dashed through the trees, and vanished.

By the time Mr. Pycraft came up, spluttering and gasping, his would-be victims were gone. For a second or two he heard the thudding of fleeing feet, and then—silence.

"Help!" howled Mr. Pycraft wetly. "I'm drowning! Help!"

He wasn't drowning at all, as he soon discovered, for the water near the bank was no deeper than four feet, and soon he was wallowing to the bank and pulling himself out.

"Anything wrong, sir?"

Travers had unexpectedly appeared from the trees. He strolled up with an expression of astonishment on his face. He had seen the flight of the cads, but he never imagined that Mr. Pycraft had not recognised them. He had decided, in fact, that he had better show himself at once, and thus prove his alibi.

"You—you—you——" began Mr. Pycraft incoherently.

"Yes, sir; but what's wrong?" asked Travers. "Can I give you a hand?"

He helped to haul the master on to the grass. Mr. Pycraft was a dreadful sight. His upper portion was streaming wet; his lower portion smothered

with thick, oozing mud. His thin hair straggled over his head like a lot of seaweed on a bladder of lard.

"You young scoundrel!" he panted, glaring at Travers. "You unprincipled young hooligan!"

"Steady, sir," protested Travers. "What have I done? Didn't you fall into the river accidentally?"

"I was pushed in," howled Mr. Pycraft. "And you know it, Travers!"

"Sorry to contradict you, sir, but I don't know anything of the sort," said the Removite. "I left my launch here, and went for a stroll."

Mr. Pycraft looked at him in amazement.

"Do you imagine, my friend, that lying will help you?" he panted. "You were on this launch two minutes ago with a number of other boys——"

"What!" interrupted Travers. "Do you mean to say that there were some other fellows aboard? You can't blame me for that, sir. If some chaps take possession of my boat while I'm away——"

"Stop!" commanded the Form-master. "Stop, Travers, this instant! Did you not tell me at the landing-stage that you were going up the river to meet some of your—er—pals? Then how can you assume this air of innocence now?"

It was a point which Travers had forgotten, and he saw that he had blundered.

"Unfortunately I did not recognise any of the boys," continued Mr. Pycraft. "One of them knocked me into the river as he came charging out of the cabin. A moment later they had all gone. But I know that there were at least five or six. You were amongst them, Travers, so do not dare to deny it."

"But I wasn't, sir," urged Travers. "I was taking a stroll——"

"How dare you stand there and prevaricate?" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "You cannot deny, Travers, that this boat belongs to you; neither can you deny that you told me you were coming

up the river to meet some of your friends. The evidence is as clear as daylight."

"What evidence, sir?"

"You were smoking—or the launch itself was on fire," said Mr. Pycraft nastily. "Do you think I did not see the smoke rising in clouds from the skylight? Come with me, Travers! It is quite certain that you did not have time to destroy the evidence of your—er—debauch."

In his rage he leapt aboard the yacht like a two-year-old, and a moment later he was standing in the doorway of the saloon. The picture which met his gaze was informative enough.

Two or three half-smoked cigarettes were lying on the beautifully polished table, still smouldering—burning the table itself in the most heart-rending manner. Cards were strewn on the seats and on the floor. Money was lying on the table, too—coppers, silver and several ten-shilling notes. In their dire haste the cads had not had time even to collect their cash.

"So!" said Mr. Pycraft triumphantly. "Now, Travers, do you dare to maintain your preposterous attitude? Not only were you smoking here with your friends, but you were gambling, too. Good heavens! I shall make it my business to urge the headmaster to expel you!"

Too late, Travers realised that he was in a trap—and it was a trap, moreover, of his own engineering. Luck had been against him. The mere fact that Mr. Pycraft had not recognised the culprits had made all the difference. He had naturally jumped to the conclusion that Travers himself had been aboard with the others. Travers' word alone was not sufficient to clear him in face of the other evidence.

"I suspected it from the very first," said the master grimly. "You came up the river in this splendid new boat for the one purpose of indulging in a disgusting orgy. Very well, Travers! You will start up the engine at once and take me back to St. Frank's. 'I

demand to know, moreover, the names of the boys who were with you."

"More trouble," sighed Travers. "Oh, well, it never rains but it pours."

He got into the cockpit, started up the engine, and presently the proud little craft was gliding downstream. Mr. Pycraft sat in the cabin shivering. He picked up a blazer which happened to be there, and wrapped it round him. Then he discovered a packet of cigarettes, and two or three cards in one of the pockets.

"Ah!" he muttered cagerly.

Whipping off the garment, he inspected the tab. His eyes glinted with malevolent satisfaction. For the name on the tab was "V. Travers."

Undoubtedly Travers' luck was out. He had thrown the blazer on to the seat before going on his stroll, for the evening was sultry and still. It was possible that Forrest or one of the others had thrust the cigarettes and cards into the pocket deliberately; but it was far more likely that things had fallen into the gaping pocket by accident in the general rush to escape. This latter, in fact, was the actual truth; but it did not help Travers in any way. The blazer was his, and the pocket contained cigarettes and playing-cards.

When St. Frank's was reached Travers took the launch skilfully to the landing-stage and tied up.

"Now, sir!" said Mr. Pycraft triumphantly. "What have you got to say to this? Is this your garment?"

"Yes, sir, that's my blazer."

"Since you deny participating in smoking and gambling, how do you account for the fact that cigarettes and playing-cards were in one of your pockets?"

"But they weren't, sir! They couldn't have been."

"Are you daring to suggest, Travers, that I am lying?" almost yelled Mr. Pycraft. "Enough! Come with me!"

He took a firm hold of Travers' arm and thus he marched him across the meadow to the playing-fields. Seniors

and juniors stared at the queerly assorted pair, and there were many chuckles of glee. Mr. Pycraft was not popular, and to see him in his present condition was a sheer joy.

Straight through Inner Court Travers was marched, and here they encountered Morrow of the Sixth.

"Ah, Morrow, I want you to take charge of this wretched boy," said Mr. Pycraft. "Keep him with you until I return."

"That's all very well, sir—" began the prefect.

"Take him to the headmaster's house, and tell the headmaster that I desire an immediate interview," continued Mr. Pycraft. "Don't argue with me, Morrow. This is a matter of the utmost importance. I shall not be long."

He dashed off to change. But he had not gone many yards before he came to a sudden halt, spun round, and retraced his steps.

"Never mind, Morrow!" he snapped. "I'll take the boy myself."

"But you can't go to the Head like that, sir," protested Morrow.

"That's just exactly what I can do—what I intend doing," said Mr. Pycraft. "I have come to the conclusion that it will be far better for Mr. Kingswood to see my condition so that he may appreciate to the full the outrage which has been perpetrated on me."

He was as good as his word, and a few minutes later he shoved Travers before him on to the headmaster's lawn, where Mr. Kingswood happened to be sitting alone, reading.

"I regret this intrusion of your privacy, sir," said Mr. Pycraft, breathing hard. "But the circumstances are so exceptional that I feel I am justified."

"What on earth have you been doing with yourself, Mr. Pycraft?" asked the Head, eyeing him up and down.

He did not like Mr. Pycraft, and his glance was more amused than concerned. However, as the Form-master

related his story, Fighting Jim Kingswood's expression became more and more stern.

"This is very serious, Travers," he said at length. "What have you to say?"

"I wasn't there, sir."

"That is an absolute lie!" shouted Mr. Pycraft excitedly. "I found his blazer within the cabin, with cigarettes and cards in the pockets."

"I left my blazer in the cabin, but I didn't have any cigarettes or cards in the pockets," said Travers. "I went for a stroll, sir. When Mr. Pycraft says that I was smoking and gambling he is mistaken."

"You assure me, on your word, that you were not with this party?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well—"

"But—but you don't believe him?" gasped Mr. Pycraft.

"I see no reason why I should not accept Travers' word," replied the Head curtly. "You have yourself admitted, Mr. Pycraft, that you did not recognise any of the boys who dashed off the launch. You cannot say, therefore, that Travers was there."

"But—but the evidence, sir—"

"The evidence clearly shows that a number of boys were using the launch for gambling and smoking," said the headmaster. "Travers, do you know who those boys were?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it any good asking for their names?"

"No good at all, sir."

"I thought as much," said the Head, "and I don't blame you for refusing to inform. But you know what it means, I suppose? You'll have to take the punishment. There is one other thing I want to ask. When you took your launch up the river empty, did you do so with the deliberate intention of lending it to your friends to be used as a retreat for gambling?"

Travers hesitated.

"Yes, sir," he admitted. "But I

didn't agree with the rotten business, and I refused to take any part in it."

"Your offence remains grave, nevertheless, for you willingly lent your boat to these boys," said Mr. Kingswood. "You may go now, Travers, and I hope your friends will come forward and confess their own guilt."

"I don't very well see how they can, sir," replied Travers smoothly.

"Do you mean that they do not belong to this school?"

It was the impression which Travers had meant to give, and although he was questioned further, he gave no "change." He did, however, manage to strengthen the impression that his companions had been outsiders.

Later, when the time for punishment came, he had a very painful fifteen minutes ahead. Floggings are unpleasant in the extreme, and Mr. Kingswood had a strong arm.

Mr. Pycraft was sadly disappointed over the whole affair; he had expected that Vivian Travers would be sacked at the very least. But the Head thought otherwise. The Head took into consideration the fact that Travers himself had not taken part in the orgy, and because of that he decided that a flogging would meet the demands of the case.

Travers took his punishment philosophically—as he took everything else. When he heard that his wonderful new launch had been confiscated he did not turn a hair. In fact, he was rather glad. He was forbidden to use it again—until his father had been informed of the circumstances.

"More trouble coming," muttered Travers dolefully. "Oh, well, perhaps I deserved this swishing. I fell into my own giddy trap, and it serves me right!"

His conscience, in fact, had given him a twinge, for he knew that he had deliberately put Mr. Pycraft on the trail, and even if it was not absolute sneaking, it was half-brother to it. So Travers felt, on the whole, that justice had been done.

But nothing could alter the fact that Bernard Forrest was at the root of all the trouble, and Forrest still held the whip-hand.

CHAPTER 11.

The Worm Turns.

A QUIET spell ensued. Forrest, scared by his narrow escape on the river, gave Travers a rest. When he had heard that Travers had been seized by Mr. Pycraft, he had fully expected a summons to the headmaster. The other cads had passed through a hectic hour, too. But the summons had never come, and they knew that Travers had not given them away. Forrest had declared that Travers would give no names, but he had not really believed that he and his fellow-culprits would escape scot-free. Fortunately there were no prolonged inquiries, although Mr. Horace Pycraft, for several days, conducted an investigation of his own. But as it came to nothing, no harm was done.

In the middle of the following week there was an important cricket fixture against Hal Brewster and his men of the River House School—old and valiant rivals of St. Frank's. Travers had been devoting himself wholeheartedly to cricket, and he had kept his men practising hard.

On the day before the match he was ready to select his team. Forrest was confident of being included, and he was discussing his chances with Claude Gore-Pearce, of Study B. Gore-Pearce was the son of a millionaire, and although he was not as unscrupulous as Forrest, he was an unpleasant fellow in many ways. He was conceited, and he laboured under the delusion that he could play good cricket. It was a constant grievance with him that he could never get a place in any team—not even in an unimportant House match.

"Well, it's a cert I'm in for to-morrow," said Forrest contentedly. "After the Grammar School match Travers daren't leave me out. Besides,

we understand one another. I can get him to do anything I like."

"If you can get him to put me into the team I'll lend you that tenner you asked me for yesterday," retorted Gore-Pearce, with a grin.

He was always plentifully supplied with money, but he was as mean as a miser. When Forrest had asked for the loan of a tenner, he had laughed in Forrest's face, although his pocket-book was bulging with notes.

"Gad!" Forrest exclaimed, staring hard. "Do you mean that, Gore-Pearce?"

Gore-Pearce had not meant it seriously, but Forrest's tone impressed him.

"Well, yes," he said, quickly considering the risks. "I'll lend you a tenner if you get me a place in the Junior Eleven."

Forrest smiled blandly.

"Might as well hand the money over," he said. "The place is as good as yours."

"You may be pally with Travers, but you can't induce him to put me in the side," said Gore-Pearce. "I'll lend you the money when I see my name on the list, and, understand, I shall want it back before the end of term."

He was quite certain in his own mind that his tenner was safe, and he had only agreed to the suggested loan so that Forrest should cut out some of his swank. He was putting Forrest to the test.

"Leave it to me, old boy," said Forrest contentedly. "I'll see Travers and fix it. He'll do anything for me. You haven't the faintest idea how splendidly we get on together."

He chuckled. Here was another unexpected way in which he could use that lever of his. By forcing Travers to do his bidding, he could get that tenner from Gore-Pearce as easily as an early bird snatches a worm. He was more than ever glad that he had kept his tongue still, for Travers, directly and indirectly, was proving to be an abundant source of income.

Later, he strolled into Study H, and

was glad to find Travers alone. As a matter of fact, the Junior captain was in the very act of drawing up the list of names for the River House match.

"Ah, just the man!" said Forrest pleasantly.

He shut the door and helped himself to the easy-chair. Nowadays, Forrest had assumed complete ownership of Study H—but only when Jimmy Potts was absent. His arrogance when he was alone with Travers was insufferable.

"Getting out the list?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"My name on it?"

"Not yet."

"But you're giving me my place, aren't you?"

"I'm thinking about it," said Travers deliberately.

"What the deuce do you mean?" demanded Forrest. "After the way I saved St. Frank's against the Grammarians——"

"Yes, we've heard all about that—about fifty thousand times," interrupted Travers patiently. "But you haven't been putting in much practice, Forrest, and a cricketer, no matter how good he is, soon gets stale. Just because you make a good show in one match, there's no guarantee that you'll repeat the performance in the next match—particularly if you slack in the meantime."

"You're going to put my name on that list, or——"

"Or down comes the chopper, eh?" grunted Travers. "I know it by heart. Well, I'll think it over."

"There's something else I want to suggest," said Forrest. "By the way, you'd better think in the right way about my name. Understand, Travers, I'm playing in to-morrow's match. Why, I've asked some friends over to see me, and I can't let them down. What do you say to the idea of putting Gore-Pearce in the team?"

"I don't say anything," replied Travers. "It isn't worth discussing."

"But I want him in the team."

"Oh, so that's it!" said Travers

slowly. "Having forced me to include you, the idea is to now include your pals? Why don't you suggest Gulliver and Bell while you're about it?"

"They're not cricketers, and you know it. Gore-Pearce is a cricketer."

"Since when?" asked Travers. "Nothing doing, Forrest. I might give you a place, if only on the strength of your showing in the Grammarian match, but I'm hanged if I'm going to include that greasy, overfed, flabby monkey's half-brother, Gore-Pearce!"

His tone was so determined that Forrest was taken aback.

"Have you forgotten how things stand between us?" he asked curtly.

"For the love of Samson, give it a rest!" snapped Vivian Travers, leaping to his feet. "Do you think I don't know how things stand? What's the good of dinning it into me day after day every time you want to force me to do something? But there's a limit, Forrest, and you've reached it."

"Now, look here——"

"Are you quite mad?" went on Travers harshly. "I'm the captain of Junior cricket, and this match against the River House is an important one. What do you suppose the Lower School will say if I shove the name of a rank duffer like Gore-Pearce on the list?"

"I don't care what the Lower School says," retorted Forrest. "I'm giving you my orders, and you're going to carry them out. Gore-Pearce wants to play, and I've promised him that I'll use my influence with you. You can't let me down, Travers. I've given Gore-Pearce my word."

Travers looked at him with sudden understanding.

"And Gore-Pearce, I dare say, is going to pay you?" he asked shrewdly. "Another money-making stunt. You have all the makings, Forrest, of one of the world's super-criminals. When you reach man's estate you will be such an expert in petty crime that you'll be able to go in for the bigger stuff without any apprenticeship."

Forrest breathed hard.

"You'll be sorry for such insu unless you're careful," he said thick. "But I'm not going to quarrel with y Travers. I'm telling you that I'm pl ing in to-morrow's game—and Go Pearce is playing, too." A cunning l suddenly came into his eyes. "Or tel you what," he added. "I'll satisfied if you put his name on yo list. Then to-morrow, before the mat you can change your mind and stitute somebody else."

Travers looked at him as though were some reptile.

"It's a funny thing you haven't a slime all over you," he said caustical

"Confound you——"

"Do you think I don't see throu your filthy dodge?" went on Trave "If I shove Gore-Pearce's name do he'll whack out a fiver or a tenner, e Then to-morrow, when I change m mind, Gore-Pearce can whistle for money. You dirty trickster!"

Forrest scowled, and he was start by the lightning quickness of Trave perception.

"I've stood as much as I intend stand from you!" he snarled. "I ta back what I said just now. I won allow you to change your mind abo Gore-Pearce. You'll put our nam down on your list—both of us! R member that Irene Manners is in much danger as you. I'll give you an hour to think it over—and you better think carefully!"

He strode out and slammed the do Vivian Travers sat down at the ta again, and his face was set with sudd determination. A thought had come, him, and it was like a ray of sunshi from between threatening storm clou

For he saw a way in which he co relieve himself of at least one burde Forrest might still blackmail him other ways, but on the subject cricket, Forrest was finished. He b pressed his advantage to such leng that he had over-reached himse There was a limit, and he had go beyond that limit. The worm, he w to find, was capable of turning.

There was a happy, cheerful look on the face of Vivian Travers as he marched into Study C—the home of Nipper, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. The study was empty, so Travers turned about, went outside, and was fortunate enough to see Nipper standing by the fountain. He was alone, and was reading a newspaper.

"Hallo, Travers!" he said, as the latter walked up. "Seen this about the Test match? There's been a change in the Australian Eleven. Bradman and Woodfull——"

"Do you mind forgetting it for a minute?" interrupted Travers. "There's something of far greater importance to discuss."

"Something more important than a Test match?" smiled Nipper.

"Yes; our match against the River House to-morrow."

"Well, of course, you're right there," admitted Nipper, with a twinkle. "St. Frank's cricket is more important any day than a paltry affair like England versus Australia. Have you selected your team yet?"

"I think you had a letter from Mr. Lee this morning?" asked Travers abruptly.

"Yes."

"It contained disappointing news?"

"Well, it all depends upon the way you look at it," replied Nipper. "Personally, I'm rather glad. 'The gov'nor originally said that he would want me to help him with a forgery case he's working on. But now he writes to say that I shan't be needed.'"

"Which means you won't be leaving the school?"

"Yes."

"I only took on the captaincy of junior cricket because there was some doubt as to your own movements," said Travers. "Well, that doubt no longer exists. You're staying on, so I resign."

"Rats!" said Nipper, laughing. "I'm rather pleased that the gov'nor doesn't need me, because it's very pleasant at St. Frank's just now. I'm keen on cricket, and I'm enjoying myself im-

mensely. It's a change to have no responsibility, so you'll oblige me by remaining skipper and talking sense, instead of rot."

"I've never talked better sense in all my life," said Travers earnestly. "I tell you I'm resigning. That means that you automatically regain the captaincy."

Nipper looked at him with curious intentness.

"There's something on your mind, Travers," he said. "I've never seen you quite so excited as this."

"Do I look excited?"

"You don't look it, but it's sort of under the surface."

"Well, never mind me—never mind my excitement," said Travers. "Is it a go?"

"Certainly not," said Nipper. "Why this terrific hurry? Wait until the River House match is over, anyhow. I don't see why there should be any change at all. Quite apart from that, it's a matter which the Junior School should decide."

"Piffle and rubbish and hokum!"

"Thanks!"

"You know jolly well that an election would be a waste of time," said Travers impatiently. "You were skipper before I took over the job, and it stands to reason that when I resign you'll be skipper again. Well, I'm telling you straight from the shoulder that I'm resigning now—here, this minute. What's more, I haven't selected to-morrow's team, and I'm leaving that to you."

Again Nipper looked at him very straightly. A glimmering of the truth came to him, for Nipper was not the kind of fellow to go about with his eyes closed. He had noticed the curiously authoritative air which Forrest had used of late when talking with Travers. He remembered how Forrest had been playing against the Grammarians. There was something behind all this—something which Travers had no desire to reveal. But knowing Travers as he

did, Nipper came to the conclusion that he was not acting in this way without good and sufficient reason. And now that he had definitely heard from Nelson Lee that he would not be wanted, there was no longer any valid reason why he should resist Travers' suggestion.

"All right," he said, still looking straight into the other's face. "If you feel that way about it, Travers, I'll relieve you of the captaincy."

The expression of relief, of joy, which leapt into Travers' eyes in that unguarded moment did not escape Nipper's keen scrutiny. Yet Travers was not the fellow to object to a little responsibility. There was, in all truth, something behind all this.

"Dear old fellow, it's a load off my mind," said Travers, recovering himself instantly and speaking with all his old careless ease. "As a carefree member of the team, I guarantee to put up a good performance to-morrow, but Heaven alone knows what kind of a show I should have made as skipper! Don't forget the last match."

"I'm not sure that I shall put you in the team," said Nipper, smiling.

"Better still!" exclaimed Travers. "I could laze about and watch, and criticize, and I can assure you there's a great deal of pleasure to be derived from that."

"You know I was only kidding," said Nipper. "I've been watching you at the nets this week, Travers, and your form is better than ever. Well, I shall have to get busy and select my team."

He spoke briskly. He was glad enough, in fact, to again have the responsibility. He liked it, for he was a born leader.

Travers went indoors, and a minute later Handforth came out.

"Seen Travers anywhere?" he asked, looking at Nipper.

"It's a funny thing you missed him—he went indoors a minute ago," replied Nipper. "What do you want him for?"

"Cricket, of course," said Handforth

darkly. "I'm not sure yet whether he's going to select me for to-morrow's match."

"I don't think he is, old man," said Nipper gently.

"What!"

"As a matter of fact, I know isn't."

"Where is he?" roared Handforth violently. "By George, I'm not going to stand—"

"Whoa! Hold your horses!" ejaculated Nipper, grinning. "Great Scott! You're like a human cyclone!"

"Wait until the cyclone hits Travers!" threatened Handforth.

"He's not going to select you for the simple reason that he's selecting nobody," explained Nipper. "He came to me a few minutes ago and resigned. I am captain again."

"Oh!"

"And I think, on the whole, that I like you to play against the River House, Handy," said Nipper, patting him on the shoulder. "How's that? Are you soothed?"

Handforth gulped.

"I say, you're not kidding?" he asked breathlessly.

"Honour bright!"

"Good man!" yelled Handforth, grabbing him and dancing him round in a waltz. "Thank goodness that the fathead Travers is out of it! So I'm in the team? Whoopee!"

He went dashing off, and within a few minutes half the Junior School knew of the change, and everybody was mightily pleased. For the Junior School had complete and absolute confidence in Nipper.

Travers, meanwhile, quite happy, was sitting in his study, waiting for Bernard Forrest.

Forrest came in with truculent assurance, and Travers knew, at the very first glance, that his visitor had heard nothing of the change of captaincy.

"Well?" asked Forrest. "Have you thought it over?"

"I have."

"And your answer?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, old fellow, I'm not in a position to give you any answer at all," said Travers andly. "It's nothing to do with me now."

"What are you trying to do?" "I'm not trying to do anything. I'm simply telling you that if you want a place in to-morrow's eleven, and a place for Gore-Pearce, you'd better go and ask the Junior skipper."

"You grinning idiot! You're the junior skipper!" "Just a little mistake of yours," said Travers gently. "Fifteen minutes ago resigned."

"What!" "And Nipper took on the job." "What!"

"So you'd better go and ask Nipper," said Travers sweetly. "But I'm afraid I won't be any good threatening him; he might not like it."

Bernard Forrest was speechless. "Better cool down, old fellow," said Travers, eyeing him with concern. "I'm afraid your blood pressure is rather high. I can see the veins sticking out on your forehead like sailor's knots. And I don't altogether like the colour of your face. If you must break a blood-vessel, be good enough to go and break somewhere else. I do hate the sight of gore all over the place. Perhaps you'd better go to Gore-Pearce's study; it will be rather appropriate."

"Confound your infernal rotting!" roared Forrest, leaning over the table and forcing himself to speak calmly. "You're the most exasperating fellow under the sun, Travers! You don't think you've fooled me, do you?"

"I'm not trying to fool you," replied Travers happily. "Nipper is now the junior skipper, and that's honest injun. Do you want me to cross my heart?"

At last Forrest was compelled to realise his hold—as far as cricket was concerned—was over. Travers had checkmated him. And Forrest raved with absolute fury for some minutes. He had counted on playing in the River House match; it was perfectly true that

he had proudly invited some friends to come and watch him. He had counted, too, on receiving that tenner from Gore-Pearce. Now everything was shattered.

"You think you've tricked me nicely, don't you?" he panted. "Well, I'm going to have my own back, Travers! I'll send a telegram to your pater——"

"And go and see Miss Bond, eh?"

"You—you——"

"Go right ahead!" snapped Travers, with sudden seriousness. "I'm sick of the whole business, anyway, and I dare say Irene is, too. I'd prefer to be in a City office than submit to this intolerable persecution. Send all the telegrams you want to—go and see a hundred Miss Bonds! Do your rotten worst!"

Travers meant it, too. He shrewdly hoped that whatever trouble came to him, none would come to Irene Manners. That affair was old now, and the older it got, the safer she was. It would be difficult to rake it all up. If she had been caught red-handed, she might have been expelled. But the danger was rapidly dwindling.

Travers' own danger, on the other hand, was as acute as ever. But perhaps not. Travers remembered the motor-launch, which his father had sent as a kind of peace-offering. That proved that Mr. Travers was relenting.

"We've finished, Forrest—understand?" said Travers boldly. "To-day you went so far that you overstepped yourself. If you get me into trouble, you'll gain nothing for yourself—but a Form trial and a pretty painful punishment. Think it over."

"I haven't finished with you yet!" said Forrest harshly.

"But I've finished with you, sweetheart," replied Travers, eyeing his visitor with complete composure. "By Samson! What a fool I've been to submit to your miserable petty villainy! I've had nothing but trouble ever since that wretched wet Saturday!"

"And there's more trouble to come—worse trouble."

"Let it come!" retorted Travers, with a shrug. "Because of you and your crookedness, I made a mess of things in the Grammar School match; because of you I had my brand-new motor-launch taken away on the very day it was delivered; because of you I received a swishing from the Head, and I'm still sore. Well, it's over. I've been a mug too long. Get out of this study, Forrest, and do your worst!"

He meant it, too. Bernard Forrest looked at him with impotent rage. The petty blackmailer, faced at last by a defiant victim, discovered that his weapon, after all, was so rotten that it could inflict no injury. It would break in two at the first blow, and a splinter was likely enough to fly back and strike Forrest himself.

To begin with, Forrest could have got both Travers and Irene into serious trouble without any injury to himself, but now it was a different matter. He had allowed weeks to pass, and he had used his knowledge infamously. Thus, he had placed a rod in pickle which could be used on his own back. If a part of the truth came out, the whole of the truth would come out. And when Forrest thought of what the Remove would do to him, he came to the conclusion that there is infinite wisdom in the old adage, "silence is golden."

Without a word he stormed out of Study H, leaving Travers really tranquil for the first time in weeks. Forrest saw the complete collapse of his cricketing ambitions.

Little did he know that his greatest opportunity was yet to come—and in a most surprising and unexpected manner!

CHAPTER 12.

The River House Match.

THE day of the River House match was hot and sunny; in fact, a typical English summer's day, with crystal blue skies and a few streaky white clouds. There had been

no rain for two or three days, and the pitch at the River House School was in perfect condition.

A large contingent of St. Frank fellows went over with the Junior XI, for the distance was under a mile and this particular match always attracted a big audience, for it was kind of "local Derby."

Cricket was taken seriously at the River House, and this year in particular—what with the great Test matches—the King of Games was the only thing that mattered.

Dr. Molyneau Hogge, the principal of the River House School, was much in evidence to-day, for it so happened that he was entertaining some distinguished visitors—Sir Basil and Lady Harper and Admiral Walton and his good lady. They were, in fact, prospective clients. Sir Basil had two sons, and Admiral Walton no less than three. They had come down to-day to give the River House School the "once over," and matters were more or less settled. Dr. Hogge was in the best of humours in the circumstances, for he considered certain that next term he would have five additional pupils.

While the junior match was in progress he escorted his guests proudly round, and they were very delighted with everything they saw.

Nipper had won the toss, and he and his men batted first. Bernard Forrest was conspicuous by his absence, for, disgusted by the fact that he had no place in the team, he went off with his pals for a spree elsewhere.

Nipper and Travers opened the batting, and Travers, free of his worries, gave a characteristically good performance. He had come right back to form.

He was enjoying himself immensely, he felt carefree, and as he batted he could have sung. He refrained, however, for such vocal efforts might have been considered *infra dig*.

Nipper, unfortunately, lobbed a ball into the hands of cover-point early in the game, and he only scored a modest

sixteen. Travers, however, went right on and made his fifty, and he seemed to be so set that many fellows believed that he would carry his bat right through the innings.

Handforth took Nipper's place, and he gave a dashing, vigorous display of his usual fireworks. Knocking three boundaries in succession, he sent the next ball right over the pavilion for six. Cheers and laughter rewarded his efforts. But, as usual, he had a brief but hectic "life." Having scored thirty-two in almost record time, he fell into a trap in trying to hit another six, and he was neatly stumped.

"Funny thing," he said, as he went to the pavilion. "I didn't know I was out of my crease."

"You only jumped about half-way to the pitch, old man," said Church running. "Never mind. You did pretty well."

Handforth did not reply. His attention was attracted by a vision—or, to be more exact, two visions—sitting close at hand. One of them was Irene Manners, and the other a stranger. She was dressed in something blue and grey; her hair, delightfully wavy, was red-gold, and her eyes were of the deepest brown. In fact, a very pretty girl.

"Well done, Ted," said Irene, as he edged nearer, trying to look unconcerned.

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth. "Eh?—I mean, it wasn't very good, really, was it? I meant to make a century."

"You always do, Ted," chuckled his chum. "I don't think you've met Connie Harper, have you?"

Connie Harper, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Sir Basil, gave Handforth a smile which seemed to tie his tongue to knots. Handforth was very susceptible to feminine charms, and the fact that Irene, his special chum, was present, made no difference. He was bitten on the instant; he "fell" for Connie with a dull, sickening thud.

Irene, who knew Handforth's little ways, was vastly amused. She was not

in any way jealous, on the contrary she was discreet enough to make an excuse and depart, so that Handforth and Connie remained together. Thereafter, Handforth gave no further thought to cricket. Connie, with her red-gold hair, occupied all his thoughts.

He was astonished, a minute later, to find that St. Frank's innings was over. At least, it only seemed a minute to him. Actually, over an hour had passed, and Nipper & Co. left the field with a total of a hundred and eighty-seven. It was not particularly good, neither was it bad.

It was a shock for Handforth when he was dragged away from Connie Harper's side—to take his place in the field. He had quite forgotten that he would be required to go leather hunting in the hot sunshine.

"Do you bowl?" asked the girl.

"Well, yes, but I don't suppose I'll be put on this afternoon," said Handforth, who was no bowler at all, but laboured under the delusion that he was. "I expect Nipper will give some of the other fellows a chance. I'd like you to see my bowling, too. I'll speak to the skipper about it, and he might put me on."

He did speak to Nipper, and Nipper grinned.

"So you want to show off in front of the new girl friend, eh?" he asked blandly. "Nothing doing, Handy! I can't allow you to brain these River House batsmen."

"Brain them?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Well, when you bowl, the ball is just as likely to go at a fellow's head as at his wicket," explained Nipper. "Larwood's high explosives aren't in it with yours. This is a cricket match, old man, not a coconut shy."

"Why, you—you—"

But Nipper was walking away, chuckling. And presently the St. Frank's XI went out into the field, and the River House innings commenced.

It opened disastrously. Hal Brewster, the River House skipper, was

taking the bowling from the redoubtable Australian junior, Jerry Dodd. With the first two balls of the over, Brewster was uncertain. He found the balls difficult to play, and he confined himself to guarding his wicket.

Then came the third delivery. Swish! A regular whanger. As Jerry saw the ball speeding on its way, he also saw Brewster swing his bat up for a big hit.

Crack!

Brewster sent it away splendidly, but Jerry Dodd, rushing halfway down the pitch, leapt high into the air, his arm outstretched.

Click!

It was a glorious catch, as unexpected as it was brilliant. Brewster, starting to run, came to a halt, staggered. He had expected the ball to go to the boundary.

"Hozzat!" yelled Jerry, as he sent the leather skywards.

"Oh, well caught!"

"Good man, Dodd!"

Norton came out to take Brewster's place, and he treated the Australian junior's bowling with the utmost respect.

After an over or two, he and Ascott settled down, and although the batting was not sensational, it was steady. The score gradually mounted up.

When it stood at sixty-three, Handforth made a good catch in the deep, and as he tossed the ball back to the bowler, he glanced round eagerly.

"Well caught, Ted!" cried a sweet voice.

Connie Harper was waving to him—and she had called him "Ted!" Handforth went hot all over, and he waved back.

"I see Handy's got a new flame," remarked Travers, with a smile. "I hope he keeps his mind on the game."

"It's a point which has been worrying me a bit," admitted Nipper. "Still, he made a good catch just then, so I think he'll be all right."

The Saints had confidently expected to make an easy win. But the River House batsmen proved obstinate, and a

situation developed which became dramatic in the extreme. Word round all over the school, and flood seniors came to watch the match. Hogge and his guests were there almost as excited as the boys themselves.

The ninth River House wicket fallen—and the score stood at 185. It runs less than St. Frank's—and the River House man was coming in!

This over would decide it, and it was any odds that River House would win the match.

Then came the tragedy.

Glynn was batting, and Harry C. ham was bowling. The ball which came down was just wide, and Glynn should not have touched it. But it was an innocent-looking ball, and he was tempted. Back went his bat, and he hit with all his strength.

"Oooooooh!" went up a gasp of groan from the River House spectators.

It looked like the end. In the second, the tension was acute. Glynn had meant to score a boundary, and thus secure a sensational victory for his team. But he had skied the ball, and it was an easy catch for the field man in the deep.

The fieldsman was Handforth. He made the catch St. Frank's would have made by two runs; if he failed—but he couldn't fail. The catch was a sure one, and Handforth's hands were sure.

The batsmen were running—for there is nothing certain in cricket. They could run three, anyway, boundary or not, and that would mean victory. Back and forth they raced.

"Handy!" almost screamed Chubb in agony.

For he had seen, to his horror, that Handforth had allowed his attention to stray. Instead of looking at the game—instead of looking at the vital ball—he was glaring towards the edge of the field, where Connie Harper stood, looking extraordinarily pretty in her blue frock. But the fact which had to be faced was that Handforth's mind from the game was that the Hon. Aubrey de Vere was

orne and his pals, Carstairs and mates, were literally surrounding the girl, and the Hon. Aubrey was having the unparalleled impertinence to finger the lock of her glorious hair. Handforth was red—in more senses than one.

Wellborne & Co. were cads—every bit bad as Forrest and Gulliver and Bell, St. Frank's. How dare they force their confounded attentions on the fair Miss Harper! Handy's eyes were glued to the girl and her tormentors.

"Handy!" went up a wild, anguished chorus.

With a jump, Handforth look round. He saw the batsmen running, he saw, at the same time, the ball hurtling straight down from the skies upon him.

He leapt, but he was flurried and unprepared. The leather struck his outstretched palm, bounded into the air, he clutched with both hands, and for the glorious split second it seemed that he would hold it. But his fingers seemed to be greased, and the ball slipped out his grasp as he stumbled headlong, and rolled to the turf.

"He missed!" groaned Nipper. "He missed! River House wins!"

Dismal groans for Handforth's inextinguishable "muff" were mingled with the cheers of the River House supporters. At this was the really critical moment the moment which was to mean so much.

Wellborne and his pals indulged in some ill-natured "barracking." It was quite like them.

"Yah! Butterfingers!" yelled the Hon. Bertram Carstairs.

"Go and bury yourself, Handforth!" shouted the Hon. Aubrey.

"You couldn't even catch a cold!" roared Coates.

They yelled with derisive laughter—and Handforth, already seeing red, lost complete control of himself. There were those cads, jeering at him in the very presence of Connie Harper! And he had seen that bad miss of his.

Handforth ran like a hare. He forgot the match, he forgot his dismal failure, he forgot everything—except

the one fact that Wellborne & Co. had annoyed the fair Connie, and had given him "the bird."

Like a human juggernaut he sailed in. Wellborne & Co. were quite unprepared for the attack.

Crash! Biff! Thud! Slosh!

Handforth's right caught Wellborne full in the face; his left rammed Carstairs on the side of the head; his right came round again, and Coates was sent sprawling.

"Oh, please!" cried Connie, startled.

"You rotters—you jeering cads!" belted Handforth. "Stand on one side, blow you!"

Wellborne & Co. rushed at him in unison. Infuriated at being knocked down in front of the girl, they charged at Handforth venomously. It was unfortunate that Church and McClure should be so near at hand, for they were always loyal to Handforth, and now they threw themselves into the fight in his defence. In less than three seconds a minor riot was taking place.

To make matters worse, a number of River House boys, thoroughly excited, joined in the fray. Then the St. Frank's cricketers, shocked and startled, streamed up.

It is an undeniable fact that Nipper and Travers and most of the others joined in the battle with the single purpose of separating the combatants. Gresham and Jerry Dodd had brought cricket stumps with them, to use as persuasive weapons. But when somebody gave Nipper a terrific poke in the eye, he not unnaturally forgot his original purpose, and hit back. Somebody else wrenched a stump from Gresham's hand, and cracked him over the head with it. After that the St. Frank's Junior XI quite unintentionally found themselves involved in a free fight.

"Great heavens! This is terrible!" shouted Dr. Hogge, as he came running up. "Boys—boys! Have you gone mad!"

There was so much noise going on that his voice was not even heard. And the headmaster of the River House School was not only angry but

anguished. That this disgraceful incident should take place before the eyes of his visitors—the parents of prospective pupils! Not three minutes ago, Admiral Walton had declared that he was quite satisfied and that he would send his three sons to the River House.

All might yet have been well but for a single painful incident. One of the cricket stumps, emerging from the thick of the scrapping juniors, flew through the air and its point struck Lady Harper's hat. Tragedy, stark and dreadful, followed. For not only was the hat whisked off, but Lady Harper's hair with it. There she stood, in the full view of scores of people, under the hot sunshine, with a head that was more or less bald!

Not unnaturally, she promptly fainted, and Sir Basil nearly had an apoplectic stroke on the spot, and was quite incapable of going to his wife's assistance.

Meanwhile, the fight was over. Nipper, shouting at the top of his voice, had managed to make himself heard. But his efforts came too late. Even as the boys separated, Sir Basil Harper found his voice.

"Disgraceful! Outrageous!" he stormed. "Never in my life have I been so insulted."

"Dad!" cried Connie, running up. "Oh, why don't you help mother?"

The girl very deftly replaced her mother's wig and hat, and she was flushing with shame, for she had heard the titter of laughter which had gone up from some of the nearby spectators. She and her father, assisted by two or three River House boys, got Lady Harper to her feet.

"To the car!" blazed Sir Basil. "We leave at once."

"My dear sir—my dear sir!" panted Dr. Hogge, running up. "I beg of you —"

"Not a word, sir!" thundered Sir Basil. "You will hear from my solicitors about this in due course. I intend to bring a lawsuit against you for assault. Yes, sir! And if you think I

will allow my sons to enter such wretchedly conducted school as you are vastly mistaken. Young hooligans, sir—that's what your pupils—nothing but young hooligans!"

Admiral Walton and his lady equally incensed, and Dr. Hogge's cry was like a cry in the wilderness. Within five minutes his guests had departed and he had lost five pupils.

For the St. Frank's Junior XI it was only the beginning of the trouble, Bernard Forrest's great chance looming near.

CHAPTER 13.

The Head Comes Down Hard.

"IT was your fault, Handy!" Nipper accusingly.

Handforth, now thoroughly cooled down, was aghast at his "crime." The affair, starting so casually, had developed like lightning into a first-class "incident." The consequences were likely to be grave.

"Don't rub it in," groaned Handforth. "I didn't mean to start a thing like that. I'll take all the blame!"

"Too late for that. I'm afraid," said Nipper. "You hopeless idiot, Handy! It's no good being wild with you!"

"Why don't you get wild with me," asked Handforth, glaring. "Kick me! Knock me down! Rave as much as you like! I deserve it, don't I?"

His complete acknowledgment of his sins disarmed his schoolfellows.

"I deserve to be booted out of school!" went on Handforth wretchedly. "I missed the catch, and got the River House the game! I slogged the cads, started a riot! Oh, my goodness! I must have been clean off my chump!"

"Everything happened because you missed the catch," said Church. "You lovelorn fathead! It was all because of that girl!"

"Don't blame her—blame me," retorted Handforth. "Didn't you see Wellborne and his pals annoying her? I'm not making excuses for myself—"

don't deserve any—but when I saw those cads forcing their rotten attentions on that ripping girl I forgot all about the match. Then, afterwards, I went for them baldheaded."

"You were impulsive, that's all," said Nipper, with a sigh. "Everything would have been all right if the incident had ended there. But other chaps joined in the scrap, and then, when we came up to separate you, we got mixed up in it, too."

Nipper's left eye was nearly closed and it was becoming ominously black. Quite a few of the other cricketers were battered, too.

Hal Brewster was very decent about it all. He was naturally annoyed that such an affair should have taken place on his own cricket field; but he made no excuses for Wellborne & Co.

"They started it," he said angrily. "They jeered at Handforth—and that was rotten bad manners. I don't blame Handy for going for them. But he might have waited until later."

"That's just Handy's trouble—he never waits," said Nipper. "Well, there's going to be the very dickens over this, Hal. You can trust me to exonerate you from all blame. Our chaps started the trouble, and our chaps must take the punishment."

The St. Frank's cricketers went back to their own school in a sad crowd. In fact, they were scared. They knew that there would be an explosion over this. At this very minute, they felt, the machinery of punishment was being set into motion.

Their feelings were right on the mark. Dr. Hogge, in a towering rage, had dashed straight off to St. Frank's. Like a hurricane he burst upon Mr. Kingswood.

"Your boys have committed an unpardonable outrage at my school, sir!" he shouted. "They have brought disgrace upon me, and they have insulted my guests."

"Really, Dr. Hogge, you mustn't shout like this," said Fighting Jim gently. "Please calm down."

"I cannot calm down, sir—I will not calm down!" thundered the River House headmaster. "Your boys have given my school a bad name. I have lost five pupils already, and Heaven alone knows how many more. When the parents of my scholars hear of what has happened——"

"Will you please explain, Dr. Hogge?" interrupted Mr. Kingswood firmly.

He was a man of strong personality, and he soon succeeded in calming his visitor down. Then came Dr. Hogge's story—somewhat incoherent at first—but as he became calmer, he managed to give Fighting Jim all the essential facts. And Mr. Kingswood's face became more and more grave.

"I am distressed, Dr. Hogge, that my boys should have created such a disgraceful scene," he said, at length. "You can be assured that I will make the most stringent inquiries, and the culprits shall be punished with the utmost severity."

"Bear in mind, sir, that your boys were the aggressors," said Dr. Hogge. "I claim no responsibility whatsoever. I can produce fifty witnesses——"

"I do not doubt your word, sir," interrupted the Head quietly. "Naturally, I shall lose no time in instituting a complete investigation. If you will be good enough to give me the addresses of Sir Basil Harper and Admiral Walton, I will write to these gentlemen and assure them that not an iota of blame can attach itself to you or your boys. I am accepting your word that the St. Frank's boys were entirely to blame and the investigation will no doubt corroborate all you have told me."

"It will, indeed," said Dr. Hogge, much mollified. "I thank you, Mr. Kingswood, for your common-sense view of the matter. I do hope that you will be able to pacify both Harper and Walton."

Mr. Kingswood was not so much interested in the two gentlemen Dr. Hogge had named. He was exercised in mind by the fact that the St. Frank's Junior XI had disgraced itself on a

neighbour's playing field. It was an offence of the utmost seriousness.

Scarcely had Dr. Hogge departed than Mr. Kingswood had another visitor. Edward Oswald Handforth, unusually pale, was ushered in.

"I have permitted you to see me, Handforth, so that I can tell you that I wish to hear no statement from you with regard to the unfortunate affair of the River House School," said the Head bluntly. "When I am ready to make my inquiries——"

"But you don't need to make any inquiries, sir," interrupted Handforth eagerly. "I'll take all the blame. It was all my fault."

"Now, look here, young man——"

"But it was, sir," urged Handforth. "Some of the River House chaps jeered at me, and, like a chump, I took offence. Everything would have been all right if I had laughed at them. But I knocked them down, and then some of our chaps came to my help, and——"

"And a free fight developed?" asked the Head grimly.

"But it wasn't their fault, sir," almost shouted Handforth. "It was my fault. My fault, sir—every bit of it! I don't care what you do to me, because I deserve it. Flog me—sack me—but don't take it out of the other chaps!"

The Head looked at him with a twinkling eye.

"I admire you, Handforth, for the open way in which you are taking the entire blame upon your own shoulders," he said. "Your frank confession, I will admit, disarms me."

"And you won't hold any inquiry, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "You won't punish the others?"

"I did not say that," replied Mr. Kingswood. "Knowing you as I do, my boy, I am quite ready to believe that it was you who started the fight. You must try to curb that impulsive nature of yours. However, as I told you at first, I am not prepared to go into this matter yet. I will bear in mind what you have said, and I will question you at the right time."

"But you can't jump on the chaps, sir——"

"That will do, Handforth," said Head, and his voice was a dismissal.

Handforth was hopeful when joined a crowd of juniors in Triangle. They had not known, then, of what he had done.

"I think it'll be all right," he said. "I told the Head it was my fault. I'm going to take all the blame."

"But you'll get sacked!" said Chu in alarm.

"Don't I deserve it?" growled Handforth. "Is it right that anybody should suffer? Fancy missing a catch!"

He seemed to be far more concerned over losing the match than anything else. Nipper and the others were no means optimistic; they felt, in their bones, that Handforth's confession would have no effect.

And they were right.

Mr. Kingswood, with his straight-from-the-shoulder directness, instituted an immediate inquiry. Nipper and other members of the team were sent for, questioned, and they came away from the Head's study in a state of procession. Other boys came from the River House School; to say nothing of seniors and masters who had been independent witnesses. Mr. Kingswood thrashed the whole thing out to its very roots.

And before the evening was over, the entire school was called together in Big Hall, and the Head announced his decision. There was a great hush as he came upon the platform.

During the past hour or so, St. Frank had been in a turmoil; the juniors were all excited, and more than a bit scared; the seniors were scandalised and indignant. Sixth Formers and Fifth Formers had been going about from house to house, bitterly complaining of the scandal which had been brought upon the school by "the kids." They were glad that their headmaster was a man of crisp, decisive action. Many another Head would have wasted days in a

an inquiry as this; but Mr. Kingswood was a real go-getter.

"I am going to tell you straight away that I take a very grave view of the unfortunate incident which took place this afternoon at the River House School," said the Head, plunging straight into the subject without any loss of words. "I have made full inquiries, and there is not the slightest doubt that a junior boy belonging to this school started the trouble."

"Me, sir," shouted Handforth. "Don't blame anybody else!"

"But this one junior boy is no more to blame than the others who took part in the disgraceful scene," continued the Head relentlessly. "One definite and conclusive fact emerges from my inquiries; the Junior Eleven of St. Frank's has disgraced itself."

"Oh!"

"Every member of that eleven took part in the fighting," said Mr. Kingswood. "These boys committed the unpardonable sin of rowdiness on the cricket ground of another school—a neighbouring school. I am shocked beyond measure. Cricket—the very word 'cricket'—is the synonym for everything that is clean in sport. Eleven boys of this school disgraced themselves this afternoon, and it is my decision that they are unworthy of representing St. Frank's in any further match this season."

There was an agonised silence for some moments. The Junior XI was stunned. Then suddenly gasps sounded, and protests. Murmurs of approval came from the dignified Fifth and Sixth.

Handforth so far forgot himself as to jump out of his place in the Remove ranks.

"But, sir, you can't do it!" he panted. "You can't punish the whole eleven. It was all my fault—"

"Silence, Handforth."

"But, please, sir—"

"As a punishment for this grave offence, I single out no particular boy," said Mr. Kingswood. "There will be

no floggings, for I realise that the fight itself developed, more or less, of its own momentum. But it stands clear that such boys are not to be trusted in the cricket field. And the boys who composed the St. Frank's Junior Eleven this afternoon are henceforth forbidden to play cricket for the school. For them Little Side will be out of bounds until further notice."

Stunned as Nipper & Co. had been before, they were now overwhelmed with dismay. They would have taken their medicine gamely if they had been ordered, one by one, to go up on the platform and receive a flogging. But to be barred from cricket—

"May I speak, sir?" asked Nipper.

"I cannot listen to any excuses," replied the Head.

"As captain of the Junior Eleven, sir, I would like to say that most of us were trying to put a stop to the fight," urged Nipper, but not very hopefully. "I dare say it looked as though we were joining in—"

"Unfortunately for your argument, young man, you appear to be the owner of a very fine black eye," interrupted the Head grimly. "Do you stand there and deny you did not hit back, after that punch had been administered?"

"Well, no, sir," said Nipper lamely. "I believe I did hit back. Who wouldn't?"

"Then your argument is completely destroyed," said the headmaster. "You have admitted that you were fighting, just as all your companions were fighting. The matter is ended. The school may dismiss."

CHAPTER 14.

Bernard Forrest's Chance.

"**B**ARRED from cricket for the rest of the season!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"It's unthinkable!"

Shouts of dismay rang out in the junior passages of St. Frank's. Everybody was thunderstruck by the headmaster's decree. Cricket, at this time

of the year was the one subject which mattered. This year more than ever, for cricket was in the very air; the entire nation was talking cricket, thinking cricket, living cricket.

"It's too awful for words!" groaned Nipper. "What are we going to do about our fixtures? We shall lose every match!"

"Why should we?" drawled Bernard Forrest, who had heard the news with joy. "There are plenty of other fellows in the Remove and Fourth, aren't there?"

"But it'll be an awful job to get up another eleven—a good one, I mean," said Nipper.

"Don't you believe it," replied Forrest. "There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out. It seems to me you chaps asked for trouble—and you got it."

"Are you asking for trouble?" demanded Handforth truculently.

"So you're going to start another fight?" sneered Forrest. "Don't you think you'd better cool down, Handforth? Haven't you caused enough trouble already?"

Handforth dropped his fists helplessly; for once he was abject.

"I admit it," he muttered. "It was all my fault—and the Head ought to have jumped on me alone. It's rotten! It's unfair! I'm going straight to Kingswood—"

"No good, old son," interrupted Nipper. "He wouldn't listen to you. You can't expect a headmaster to change and chop about. He's made his decision, and there's an end of it. After all, he's right, you know. We were all fighting, and we did disgrace St. Frank's Junior cricket. It's just rotten bad luck. Nobody meant to do anything discreditable, and in our eyes the whole incident was trifling. But headmasters and other people are apt to look at these things in a different way."

Forrest had walked off with gleaming eyes. This disaster to the Junior XI was his opportunity. All this season he had planned and plotted to get into

cricket. He had used Travers for a purpose—until Travers had got sick of it. Now, unexpectedly, Fate had put it into his hands. And Forrest, for all his unscrupulousness, was a fellow of considerable driving force. When he liked to put his mind to it, he could be very convincing, very volcanic.

He gathered about him, now, his chums, Gulliver and Bell, Gore-Pearce, Hubbard, Owen major, and Hart.

"My sons, we're going to do this," he said briskly. "St. Frank's, at the moment, is without a junior skipper, but that's soon going to be corrected."

"I expect they'll elect Buster B. of the Fourth," said Owen major. "I wasn't playing to-day—"

"They won't elect Boots," interrupted Forrest. "They'll elect me."

"What!"

"I've made up my mind to take the cricket," went on Forrest coolly. "What's more, I'll see to it that my pals are in the eleven. You'll get me, place, Gore-Pearce, after all."

"Gad! I wish you meant it!" cried Claude Gore-Pearce.

"I do mean it—as you'll find before you're many days older," said Bernard Forrest, squaring his jaw. "When I make up my mind to a thing I go straight ahead."

He did go ahead, too. No sooner had he announced that an election would be held to select a new junior captain than Forrest entered his own name. Others were John Busterfield Boots, Tim Armstrong, and the Hon. Douglas Glegton. The entire Junior School was now in a turmoil. Cricket was in a melting-pot, so to speak, and before anything definite could be done, a new captain had to be elected, and a new team chosen.

For the next day or two it was all thing but excitement in the Junior School. Bernard Forrest, with tremendous driving force, urged his own qualifications. One of the great points in his favour was that he had put up a very good show in the match against Bannington Grammar School. He

ignantly declared that he had been dropped—by Nipper—without reason. He swore that there had been a lot of jealousy in the old eleven, and he maintained that if he became skipper, he would give every fellow his chance.

It was unfortunate that Buster Boots had had bad luck this season. He had only played in one or two matches, and he had not scored more than ten runs. Twice he had been out for a duck. Armstrong, of the East House, was no great cricketer, and the Hon. Douglas Singleton took life far too easily to be regarded as a serious candidate.

Forrest gave himself no rest; he addressed meetings morning, noon and night. He went further than that. He took crowds of juniors out to the nets, and he gave brilliant displays of batsmanship. Undoubtedly he was at the top of his form now; he had never played such cricket. He seemed to be inspired.

All of which, no doubt, was the direct result of his battle of wits with Vivian Travers.

For a period he had held Travers under his thumb, and he had forced Travers to put him in the team; he had dreamed of remaining in the team for the entire season. Then, like a bolt from the blue, Travers had checkmated him. Now, like another bolt from the blue, his opportunity had come. He went at it with both fists with tremendous energy.

He even forgot to smoke, or to gamble. He had got cricket into his blood, and, rotter though he was, he could certainly play—and it was in his favour that he wanted to play. Perhaps he felt that his pride would suffer an ignominious fall if he did not assert himself now.

He knew that Buster Boots was his only serious rival, and if Boots were elected captain he—Forrest—would never be given a place in the new XI. For he and Boots were on the worst possible terms, Boots being a thoroughly decent fellow.

While all this was going on Nipper

& Co. were mere spectators. They were out of it. Eleven of them—bidden to even walk on Little Side—bidden to play for the school.

Two days after the dread blow had fallen they were getting desperate. Ordinarily they had been in the habit of rising early and going out to the nets for practice. They had dashed off to Little Side, too, immediately after morning lessons. Most of them had spent nearly all their leisure hours on the playing fields. Now they could do nothing but mooch about the Triangle, or moon round the passages.

"This can't go on," said Nipper grimly. "It's not going on, either. My sons, a brain-wave came to me this morning."

He was in the Triangle now, and round him he had gathered the late XI. In other parts of the Triangle candidates for the captaincy were holding their own meetings, and there was a considerable noise.

"What's the good of a brain-wave?" asked Handforth gruffly. "Nothing can alter the fact that we are barred from playing cricket."

"But we're not."

"Eh?"

"We're only barred from Little Side."

"What's the difference?"

"All the difference in the world," replied Nipper keenly. "My idea is to take the Head literally—to accept the exact letter of his decree. I can remember his very words: 'Those boys are forbidden to play for the school for the remainder of the season.' 'Little Side is out of bounds until further notice.' Remember those words, my sons, and think hard."

"What's the good of thinking?" asked Harry Gresham impatiently. "We can't play, and there's an end of it."

"We can't play on Little Side—we can't play for the school," agreed Nipper. "But what's to stop us having a ground of our own?"

Handforth jumped.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "You

—you mean, prepare a pitch for ourselves and then fix up our own matches?"

"Exactly."

There was a buzz of excitement, and Nipper's audience looked hot and eager.

"There's a meadow just across the road—almost opposite the gates," continued Nipper. "We can hire it from Farmer Holt for a few shillings a week—he's doing nothing with it just now. And if we all put our backs into it we can roll it and cut it—"

"Hold on," said Travers sadly. "At first it seemed to be a great idea, but there's an awful snag."

"Name it," said Nipper.

"Well, the Head wouldn't stand for it, that's all," replied Travers. "You don't think he'd calmly stand by and let us dodge his decree like that, do you?"

"Yes."

"Then you're an optimist."

"Not so much an optimist as a good judge of character," said Nipper calmly. "Mr. Kingswood is no ordinary headmaster. Remember, he's a sportsman—a great boxer, an athlete. He was down on us mainly because old Hogge had kicked up the dickens of a fuss, and he felt that he had to be drastic. We're not going to play on Little Side, and we're not going to play for the school. Very well. Can he drop on us if we play on our own private ground? He said nothing about barring us from cricket altogether. Dash it, we can do as we like, can't we, in our own leisure time?"

"It's worth thinking over, dear old fellow," said Travers dreamily. "I believe you're right about the Head. He's a great sport, and I believe he'll turn a blind eye. Naturally, we shall be defying him; but, as we shall be sticking to the letter of his decree, we shall be within our rights. It just remains to be seen what he'll do about it."

"It's worth risking, anyhow," said Nipper. "If we had old Hogge as a headmaster we couldn't even try the

thing. I'm banking on Fighting Kingswood's sportsmanship. If half the man I think he is he'll be blind as a bat, and, in private, chuckle at our activities and approve them."

"I say, we can go further, can't we," asked Handforth eagerly. "We can up games with the Grammarians, with Helmford, and—"

"Oh, no," said Nipper. "I wouldn't be playing fair. Any Frank's team that plays Bannington Helmford must be a representative Frank's eleven. Ours won't be a Frank's eleven at all—it'll be my eleven. The Head might wink if we fix games with outside schools, but to come down like a ton of bricks if played against the schools in the fixture list. All we want is cricket, and we'll get it."

"Meanwhile, Forrest looks like being himself elected as Junior captain," said Travers, with a vivid remembrance of Forrest's recent coercion. "By St. Paul, hark at him now! You've got to give the fellow credit, he's putting up a tremendous fight."

Already the election was a foregone conclusion.

When the hour came for voting, Bernard Forrest was confident. Like a whirlwind he had conducted his campaign, and he had aroused the masses and fired to great enthusiasm. He had told the unthinking fellows that he was a great leader, a great cricketer, and they believed him. He made generous promises, and his boasts were picturesque.

"Why worry because the old eleven has been washed out?" he demanded. "Isn't it time there was a change? Look at the River House match. Nipper's eleven scored a paltry hundred and eighty-seven—and lost the game. Why, any eleven that I could choose would do better than that. What about the Abbotsford match? Nipper's eleven lost—badly."

"But it rained!" shouted somebody.

"Which only proves that Nipper's a bad skipper," retorted Forrest. "The weather was uncertain, and the ground was damp. He won the toss, but he put Abbottsford in first. If he and his men had batted first there would have been a different story."

Thus, by such arguments, by twisting facts, Forrest gained more and more supporters.

There was great enthusiasm when the time for voting came. Forrest carried all before him. He was elected by an overwhelming majority, and one of the most surprising reversals in the history of the St. Frank's Junior School had come about.

Forrest, the slacking outsider, had become supreme controller of Junior cricket!

CHAPTER 15.

The Rebel XI.

THE election over, the excitement died down.

Forrest, as captain, calmly made his plans for the match against Elmford College, which was to take place in two days' time—at St. Frank's. Forrest gave himself wholeheartedly to cricket, and he kept such fellows as Fore-Pearce and Gulliver and Hubbard hard at work at the nets.

"There's one thing to be said for the fighter," admitted Buster Boots. "He's taking this cricket seriously. I'm beginning to believe that he'll make a good show."

"Think he'll select us for his eleven?" asked Bob Christine.

"Not a chance," growled Boots. "He'll pick all his own cronies."

Meanwhile, Nipper had successfully negotiated with Farmer Holt, and the meadow, on the other side of the road opposite the St. Frank's gateway, became the playing field of the Rebel XI. Having decided upon this thing, Nipper and his chums went into it with wholehearted enthusiasm. They did so openly, knowing that it would be perfectly useless to attempt any secrecy.

And, of course, before long the whole school was talking about it. Fellows were saying that the Head would soon get to know, and he would put a stop to it all.

But, after all, the headmaster of a great Public school has many other things to think about, and if he takes interest in cricket at all, it is any odds that he will confine himself to Senior cricket. Headmasters and other masters are apt to regard Junior cricket as somewhat beneath their notice. Which, from the point of view of the juniors, is sheer nonsense.

Behold, therefore, eleven hard-working and enthusiastic Removites labouring in the hired meadow. It must be confessed that the Fourth Formers, in the main, were not sorry to see the downfall of the Junior XI. For this season, in particular, there had been much controversy and jealousy in the ranks of the Fourth. The Fourth felt that any representative Junior XI should contain five or six Fourth Formers. But it so happened that Nipper had selected for the River House match an XI consisting entirely of Removites. Certainly, he had been justified, for he had chosen the best men, Buster Boots, Bob Christine, and other Fourth Formers had openly declared that he was off his rocker.

Now that Nipper's XI was banned, they were hoping to get a look in. But it was a forlorn hope—as evidenced by the conversation between Boots and Christine. Forrest was not likely to select many Fourth Formers. Or, if he did, they would be his own discreditable pals—fellows like Merrell and Marriott and Snipe.

Nipper and his men worked like niggers. Their first job on the new pitch was to cut the grass. They marked out a big square section of the meadow, and mowed the grass down closely. Then they gave their care to the pitch itself.

Wonders were performed in a miraculously short time.

They got up hours before the rising bell in the clear sunshine of the summer's morning; they borrowed Farmer Holt's rollers and water-carts. They watered the meadow, rolled it and cut it, and the transformation was something akin to a modern miracle. It was a mere proof of what could be done by determined fellows who put their heart and soul into their work.

The very instant morning lessons were over Nipper and his men rushed out to get on with the job; they did not desist until a minute or two before dinner. Then they had it out again. As soon as afternoon lessons were over they were on the job once more. Tea was forgotten—it did not matter. They worked so hard that at the end of the day they were nearly dropping with exhaustion.

But young bones quickly recover, and in the morning, except for a little stiffness, they were as fit as ever again. Other juniors came and inspected the new field, and, now and again, seniors came across, and there were many headshakes.

"Whilst I admire the spirit which has prompted this lavish display of energy, brothers, I must warn you that you are probably wasting your time," said William Napoleon Browne, the long, lean skipper of the Fifth Form. "Indeed, I fail to understand why you have been allowed to carry on so far."

"The Head's a good chap, Browne," said Nipper. "He must know about this—but he's winking his eyes at us."

"I hope you are right, Brother Nipper—but I doubt it," said Browne, shaking his head. "Only this morning I was in conversation with Brother Paget—and Brother Paget was inclined to be quite pessimistic."

"Old Paget would get us into trouble if he could," agreed Nipper. "Don't you mention your bad-tempered old Form-master to us, Browne. And what about Pycraft? Don't you think he's as bad—and worse? He's been nosing about here two or three times, and if he hasn't given the tip to the Head, I'm

a Hottentot. But we're carrying on until the Head himself comes along and squashes us."

"A sound, sensible way to look things," declared Browne, with approval. "Perhaps you will permit me to offer a word of criticism? The only thing I may say so, somewhat resembles a rubbish dump."

"What you're looking at, you are a rubbish dump," said Nipper. "I've been picking up all the stones, digging up roots by the score, and all that sort of thing. Here's the real pitch—this side."

"Forgive me," said Browne fully. "Ah! This, Brother Nipper, is decidedly better. Not good, of course, but better."

"You fathead!" said Handforth, of face and dusty of hand. "It's a billiard table."

"And all these holes, I presume are the pockets?" asked Browne politely.

But he was only kidding. The previous afternoon, after careful nursing and tending, rolling and watering and cutting, really excellent. Considering that three days before this meadow had a rough piece of pastureland, the change was astounding.

"And what are you going to do with the matches?" asked Browne. "Will you play five aside, with the eleventh as umpire?"

"You can't help it, Browne, old man," said Nipper kindly. "Two days ago I wrote to the junior captain of Lea Hall School, and this morning I got a reply. He's bringing a team over to play this afternoon."

"Good work," said Browne. "I certainly have to come along and watch."

"St. Frank's play Helmford this afternoon, too," grinned Handforth. "But what do we care? Let Forrester on with it. We're having our game."

Lea Hall School was a comparatively small establishment, several miles from the other side of Caistowe. It had never been considered worthy of in-

tion in the St. Frank's fixture list, so the Junior captain, on getting Nipper's invitation, had eagerly accepted. Nipper had been quite frank; he had told the Lea Hall man that it would not be an official game, but only a friendly. But even a friendly was welcome to the fellows of Lea Hall School.

Nipper was very anxious. This match, if it came off, would be a test case. The headmaster might come along and prohibit it, or he might not. If he did not, then it would be reasonable to assume that the rebels could carry on. Banned from cricket, they would be playing cricket just the same—or, in other words, they would be tacitly defying the headmaster's ban. Mr. Kingswood might consider that his authority had been flouted, and in such an event he would take action. On the other hand, he, being a sportsman, might take the view that the boys were within their rights. In cold truth, St. Frank's would be playing Lea Hall School; but, as the match was unofficial, and would be unrecorded, it might be ignored.

As a matter of fact—and it would have been very difficult to get the juniors to believe—Mr. James Kingswood had been so busy of late that he had had no time to give to the affairs of the juniors. Both Mr. Pycraft and Mr. Paget had casually mentioned to him that the late Junior XI was flouting him, but he had taken little heed of their words. And now that the big day had come, he still knew nothing of the real facts.

The rank and file of the Junior School was torn between the official match and the rebel match. Both started at exactly the same time. On the whole, the boys decided to watch Forrest & Co. For Forrest had selected a strange team; he had not only included Gore-Pearce, but Gulliver and Owen major and Hubbard and Marriott and Merrell—juniors whose cricket powers were anything but enviable. Forrest was having his fling—he was proving that he had been un-

worthy of being elected junior captain; for he was displaying stark favouritism. True, Forrest had kept his men hard at practice, and they had shown signs of improvement. But to play them in a match against Helmford College, and leave out such fellows as Boots and Christine and De Valerie was the height of folly.

Yet Forrest was most enthusiastic in his work, and it was obvious he was anxious to register a win.

When the match started there was a record crowd gathered round the boundaries. Forrest and Hubbard went out to open the St. Frank's innings—and the tragedy began. Forrest, admittedly, batted well. In the first over he scored two boundaries, and he seemed to settle down to a game fight.

But when the bowling changed to the other end, Hubbard was out first ball. Then came a regular procession—until, indeed, the spectators, dismayed at first, yelled and laughed with derision.

It was one of the strangest sights ever seen at St. Frank's. Three of Forrest's team were skittled out in that one over. Then, when Forrest got the bowling again, he hit out valiantly, and scored well. After that there was a complete collapse, and the rest of the St. Frank's Junior XI was quickly dismissed.

Forrest had scored twenty-two, and the others, between them, had managed to make six. There were four byes, so the St. Frank's total was 32.

"It's a washout!" said Boots, in disgust. "Just what we expected. Something ought to be done about it, you chaps."

"I feel sorry for Forrest," said Yorke. "He did the best he could—you've got to say that for the man. It was those other men who let him down."

"Dash it, he picked them, didn't he?" demanded Boots. "What kind of a skipper do you call that?"

There was no more interest in the game, for it was fairly certain that

Helmford's opening batsmen would score the necessary runs for victory. Or, if they didn't, victory was assured, nevertheless.

Then rumours began to float about that a great game was going on on the unofficial ground, over the road. Fellows began to drift away; presently it became an exodus. All the spectators from the junior match hurried across the Triangle, dashed over the road, and climbed into Farmer Holt's meadow.

It was a glorious scene. Nipper and his merry men were in the field, and here cricket was being played as it should be played. Lea Hall School had lost four men, and their score stood at eighty-three. It was a real match. The batsmen now in were hitting well, taking every advantage of the loose balls that came their way. But largely owing to the pitch, the conditions favoured the bowlers.

Quite a few seniors were standing about, and one or two prefects were uncertain as to what they should do. But they had received no orders, so they watched in silence. The very fact that Mr. Alington Wilkes, the House-master of the Ancient House, was on the spot, seemed to indicate that everything was all right. With him was Mr. Suncliffe, of the Third. Old "Sunny" was a great cricket enthusiast. In fact, he was such a fanatic on the game that the fags made a habit of using him to their own nefarious ends. They would get him talking about the Test matches in the middle of lessons, and for half an hour Mr. Suncliffe would prattle on, discussing Larwood, Jardine, Woodfull, Bradman and the others. Then he would suddenly recall himself to his duties, and work would proceed—until another fag succeeded in again working cricket into the conversation.

"Personally, I think the boys are fully justified," said Mr. Suncliffe firmly. "I did not agree, in the first place, with the headmaster's ban. Why should they be denied from cricket?"

"Denied or not, they are playing," said Old Wilkey gently.

"And good luck to them, sir," said Mr. Suncliffe. "Cricket is the greatest game under the sun. These boys live for it—they dream of it. Can you imagine their wretchedness when they learned that they were to be denied from the game for the rest of the season? Preposterous! I think they are deserving of the highest praise for asserting themselves in this way."

"Yet it cannot be denied that they are taking a big risk," said Old Wilkey, looking round. "I'm hoping against hope that the Head won't get to hear of the match. I had a word with him at lunch-time, and he seemed to know nothing. When it's all over, perhaps — Good gracious! He's coming now!"

"Where—where?" asked the Third Form Master, staring round. "Dear me, Mr. Wilkes! We must put a stop to this! We mustn't let the Head come here and spoil the game."

Old Wilkey, who was one of the best, strode off with a twinkle in his eye. Mr. Suncliffe trotted beside him. They managed to intercept Mr. Kingswood just as the latter was breaking through a gap in the hedge.

"Lovely day, sir," said Mr. Suncliffe, waving a vague hand towards the blue sky.

"Can you tell me what is going on here, gentlemen?" asked Fighting Jim.

"Oh, just a friendly match," said Old Wilkey.

"I have been informed that the late Junior Eleven has defied my orders and is playing against Lea Hall School," said the headmaster. "I cannot understand why I did not hear of this before."

"A man in your responsible position, sir, cannot be expected to hear of every such trifle," said Mr. Suncliffe. "Pray don't bother about it. The boys are enjoying themselves. The match is quite unofficial, and it is being played upon a ground which is unofficial, too. This property belongs to Farmer Holt."

and the boys have hired the meadow from Holt. I do not see how you can possibly prevent the boys from spending their leisure in the way they think best—as long as they are acting decently and honourably.

The Head looked at the two masters hard.

"When you put it like that, I think I understand what you mean, Mr. Suncliffe," he said dryly.

He had seen the twinkle in Old Wilkey's eye, and an answering twinkle came into his own. He stepped nearer to the hedge, parted the leaves, and stared through the gap.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

He had expected to see a rough meadow—and, consequently, a rough game. He saw, instead, an almost perfect cricket ground, with crowds of enthusiastic spectators.

He saw white-clad figures running, and it was evident that the game was being conducted in just the same way as any ordinary St. Frank's fixture.

"I see," he said, laughing.

Mr. Wilkes and Mr. Suncliffe laughed, too. They all looked through the gap, and then they all laughed again.

Mr. Kingswood looked at his watch.

"Will you excuse me, gentlemen?" he said solemnly. "I have just remembered that there is some urgent work I must do."

He nodded, and moved away, then he turned back.

"You can tell me the result later, Mr. Wilkes," he said confidentially.

CHAPTER 16.

The End of the Match.

IT was an absolute triumph for the Rebel XI.

Mr. Kingswood had come, he had seen, and he had silently departed. In a word, he had made up his mind, then and there, to let the rebels carry

on. But as he could not very well give their conduct his sanction, it was up to him to make himself scarce.

Just as the "official" match had been a fizzle, the victory of Nipper's men was great. They were all in tip-top form, in spite of their recent labours, and they defeated Lea Hall School by five wickets. Yet the victory could never be recorded, for it was an insignificant "friendly." Still, it was a start, and the mere fact that it had come off without interference was cause enough for jubilation.

Bernard Forrest was in an evil mood that evening. While he and his XI had been in the field, scarcely a spectator had remained to watch. All of them had flocked to see Nipper & Co.'s match.

"It's intolerable!" stormed Forrest. "These chaps have been forbidden to play, and yet they fix a match, and pinch our spectators."

"If you and your men had played better cricket, the spectators would never have deserted you," said Boots.

"I'm going to complain to the Head about it!" went on Forrest savagely. "I had a word with Old Wilkey, but he shut me up."

"Sensible man!" said Reggie Pitt, grinning.

"Resign, Forrest!" went up a yell.

"Hear, hear!"

"Resign—resign!"

"You're a washout!"

"You're no good!"

Quite a crowd had collected in the Triangle, and Forrest faced the juniors with a flash of indignation.

"I thought you called yourselves sports?" he sneered. "Is it fair to jump on me like this? You know jolly well that I've only just taken up the captaincy. How do you expect me to perform miracles? I've got to get my team into shape, haven't I?"

"You'll never get that team into shape," said Pitt.

"Won't I? Wait and see!" shouted Forrest. "I know what I'm doing—and I'm going to prove that I can train

my own team, and win matches—just as good as Nipper. There's a whole week before the next big match comes off, and during that week I'll get my men into tip-top form."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated De Valerie suddenly. "I'd forgotten until now. The next big match is against Brent College."

"Oh!"

"Crumbs!"

Groans went up on all sides. The mere thought of Forrest & Co. meeting the "hot" men of Brent College was painful.

Brent was a great Public school, thirty miles away, which had not yet hitherto arranged fixtures with St. Frank's. It was owing to Nipper's good work that Brent had agreed to the match. It was a proud school, with a great record, and for many seasons St. Frank's had been trying to get Brent on the fixture list. At last, Nipper had succeeded. From the very first day of the season, both Nipper and Vivian Travers had been dinning it into the heads of players that they must put up a good show against the mighty men of Brent. If they didn't, Brent would regret having made the fixture. It was the one really "classy" match of the season. It could almost be described as a classic.

And now, owing to the unfortunate developments, it was left for Forrest and his men to go over to Brent College and do their stuff. What ghost of a hope was there that Forrest would carry on the fine traditions of the St. Frank's Junior XI?

In to-day's match against Helmford there had been two unpleasant incidents. In both cases, Forrest's men had been guilty of bad sportsmanship, and only the tact and good temper of the Helmford skipper had avoided bad feeling.

Forrest kept his word. He gave his men no rest; morning and evening he insisted upon their attendance on Little Side, and he kept them hard at practice. Some of them, indeed, were

beginning to feel it was a doubtful honour to be in the XI. There was much hard work attached to it.

A sensible captain would have dropped many of those "duds," and would have selected really good cricketers. But Forrest was obstinate, wilful, and having said that his men could be licked into shape, he proceeded to lick them. He was determined to prove himself right—those who watched were pessimists. Day followed day, and although Herbert and Owen major and the others improved, they showed no signs of really good form.

The Brent match was fixed for Wednesday afternoon. On the Monday Nipper called a meeting of his friends—and these included all the best fellows in the Remove. For several days Nipper had been thinking hard on the subject of the Brent match, and it concerned him deeply.

The meeting was held in the Ancient House Junior Common-room, and the windows were closed, and two fellows were placed against the door so that there should be no interruptions.

"What's the idea of all this?" asked Handforth, looking round.

"Listen to me, you chaps," said Nipper gravely. "This thing is serious."

"What thing?"

"This business of the Brent match," said Nipper. "I've just learned Forrest's arrangements for Wednesday. The whole team is going over to Brent by motor-coach. Forrest's as proud as a peacock, and he's keeping his duffers like Owen major and Marriot in his team. You know what happened in the Helmford match, don't you? Two of the rotters played dirty—and that's an unforgivable sin in cricket."

"Yes, rather!"

"What guarantee is there that Forrest's men won't play dirty at Brent?" continued Nipper. "If there's any unpleasantness of that sort, Brent will never arrange fixtures with St. Frank's again."

"Even if Forrest's men do behave

themselves. Brent will be fed up," said Reggie Pitt. "They're expecting great things from St. Frank's."

"They'll see great things, too," said Nipper, his eyes beginning to glow.

"What!"

"The St. Frank's Junior Eleven will give Brent a first-class game," said Nipper deliberately.

"You must be dotty!" said Handforth, staring. "Haven't you seen Forrest and his washouts? I'll give Forrest his due, and say that he has been doing his best. But what does it amount to?"

"Listen, my children," said Nipper, lowering his voice. "The Brent match is the 'high spot' of our season. We've got to see to it that St. Frank's puts up a good show—and, if possible, win. There's a way in which it can be done. Gather round, and let me have your ears."

They were mystified; but not for long. As Nipper expounded his "great idea" his listeners were aghast. The thing he suggested gave them one of the biggest shocks of their lives. But soon, after Nipper had elaborated, they became excited, joyful; and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Nipper restrained them from breaking out into yelling cheers.

"By George, it's the very idea I ought to have thought of!" said Handforth breathlessly. "In fact, I would have thought of it if I'd had more time. I believe the idea was at the back of my head all the while——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It can be worked, too," went on Handforth. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! What a wheeze! What a glorious jape!"

"It's worth barrow-loads of gold," said Vivian Travers, gazing at Nipper in wonder. "By Samson, I wonder, old fellow, if you would object if I kissed you?"

"Try it and see!" grinned Nipper. "Now, cut it out, Travers. You other fellows, too. This is serious."

"Serious?" murmured Harry Gresham. "Why, it's the funniest thing I've heard of in years!"

"Well, funny or not, it's only a theory at the present moment," said Nipper. "We've got to put it into practice—and, if we're going to do that, we've got to think of ways and means. There are many points to be discussed—many details to be settled. There are too many of us here for that, so I'm going to appoint a committee—Travers, Handforth, Pitt, and myself. You other chaps leave everything to us—and be ready for action when the call comes."

The next day, Tuesday, the fellows were talking of a match which the Rebel XI had fixed up against some obscure village team. Nobody even knew the name of the village, but it was understood that the game was to be played on a public village green somewhere in the wilds. There was a good deal of laughter about it. It seemed that the rebels were not having much luck. It was difficult for them to arrange games. And they were glad enough, apparently, to play against any rustic side which would say "yes."

Meanwhile, Forrest was taking things seriously; he was fooling himself. On the Wednesday morning he openly boasted of bringing off a great victory at Brent College. Owing to the long distance, only a few supporters were going with the team—Forrest's own friends. There was just room for a few in the motor-coach. There would be no great crowd of Removites and Fourth Formers, as was usually the case when St. Frank's played against such schools as the River House and Bannington Grammar School.

The Rebel XI had been a nine days' wonder; interest in Nipper & Co. had petered right out by this time. After all, it was difficult to sustain interest in a team which was banned from playing real cricket for the school. In some ways Nipper & Co.'s activities were pitiful. As for to-day's match, it was beneath contempt.

Nipper and his men went off on their

bicycles to their rural destination. Nobody cared where they went, for the match was of no appeal. It was rather curious, however, that practically all the other Removites had business away from the school; they went on bicycles, on motor-bikes, and soon St. Frank's had a deserted look.

The Junior XI, looking very smart, very businesslike—and appearances are deceptive—climbed into the dazzlingly smart motor-coach which Bernard Forrest had hired. Forrest was bitterly disappointed by the fact that none of the fellows were crowding round to see the XI off, and to cheer it to victory.

"And they call themselves sports!" he said sourly. "Well, we'll show them!"

Brent College was in Kent, and after passing through Helmford the coach made good speed and branched off into a quiet secondary road which led through miles of empty agricultural country.

Twelve miles from Brent, on a particularly lonely stretch of road, the coach-driver was astonished to see, on turning a bend, a complete barrier across the road. It was composed of schoolboys and bicycles. They stood there, blocking the road from hedge to hedge. Some of them were in flannels, and wearing blazers, and their caps proclaimed them to be Removites of St. Frank's. Altogether, there were at least two dozen of them.

"Something fishy about this," said Forrest, in alarm. "Don't stop, driver!"

"What do you mean—don't stop?" asked the driver. "Do you think I can run them down?"

"Turn aside—do anything!" shouted Forrest. "Look! Our chaps—Ancient House and West House Removites. There's not a Fourth Former or a Third Former among them. It's Nipper and Handforth and Pitt and Travers and that crowd!"

"But they've gone to their own match!" gasped Gulliver.

"Stop! Turn aside! Go back—do anything!" gurgled Forrest, grabbing at

the driver's arm. "I tell you, the fellows mean mischief——"

"Don't be a young fool!" said the driver, forced to speak harshly. "We are you pulling my arm like that? You'll have us in the ditch next!"

He was obliged to bring the coach a standstill; and even as it halted Nipper & Co. and their supporters came running up, and they crowded round the two doors of the coach.

"What does this mean?" shouted Forrest angrily.

"It means, my poor fellow, that Brent College is going to have a game," replied Nipper. "Will you come out quietly, or shall we drag you out?"

"You're mad!" yelled Forrest. "This is beyond the limit!"

"Not yet," said Travers sweetly. "It's going to be."

"You—you—lunatics!" gasped Forrest. "You can't do a thing like this. We're the official St. Frank's Junior Eleven——"

"And we don't think much of it," said Nipper. "But as we think a good deal of the name of St. Frank's, we're going to bring about a little transformation scene. I'd like to point out that we're two-to-one, so if you start any trouble you're bound to get the worst of it."

"None of your games, young gentlemen," said the driver. "I've been instructed——"

"We'll have a little chat with you later," said Nipper. "Don't worry—we won't detain you long. I can assure you that this is all being done in a good cause."

Forrest was nearly speechless with fury; his team was scared. Most of them, being fellows of little spirit, climbed out of the coach and gave themselves up without a fight. Forrest himself, with a bellow of rage, leapt down and lashed out to right and left. But he was very soon seized and rendered helpless.

"This way, dear old fellow," said Travers, smiling into his face. "I wonder if you appreciate just how much

"I am enjoying this? Do we understand one another?"

"You'll be sorry for this!" panted Forrest hoarsely.

But his captors only laughed. They marched him through a gap in the hedge, and he found himself in a quiet meadow. Quite nearby stood a big, old-fashioned barn with a thatched roof. It was a good barn, with stout walls, and only one door. There were no windows of any kind, and after Forrest & Co. had been forced within the building they could see that there was no possible escape—once the door was closed upon them.

"You won't need your bats or pads," said Nipper, "but we shall, so we'll leave them in the coach. We'll come back for you, my sons, some time during the evening."

"Do you mean that you're going on to Brent College—to play our match?" howled Hubbard.

"Has it only just sunk in?" grinned Handforth. "Of course that's what we're going to do. Hasn't it occurred to you that we've never played Brent College before? Their fellows have never come to St. Frank's, and we've never gone to Brent. That means that they don't know any of us by sight."

He roared with laughter.

"You'll be sacked for this!" snarled Forrest. "By gad, you've gone absolutely crazy! When the headmaster hears——"

"How can he hear—unless you sneak?" asked Nipper. "And supposing you do sneak? Anyhow, we're taking the risk. You'd better understand, Forrest, that we're leaving a strong guard outside this door—and sentries round the other side of the building—just in case you try to bore a hole through the wall. There's no escape for you, so you'd better make the best of a bad job. Well, so-long! Sorry we can't stop longer, but we're in a hurry."

There was much laughter when the door was slammed, and a great iron bar was placed in position. Forrest & Co.,

within, shouted and stormed in their rage; but, against such a large number, they were helpless.

De Valerie, Archie Glenthorne, Justin B. Farman, Somerton, Russell, Goodwin and others, took up their stand outside.

"Leave them to us, Nipper," said De Valerie. "I'm in charge here, and you've got nothing to worry about. Go right ahead."

"We will," grinned Nipper. "See you later."

Eleven juniors climbed into the coach—in a word, the St. Frank's Rebel XI, until recently the St. Frank's Junior XI.

"I don't think I can allow this," said the driver dubiously. "I was instructed——"

"You'll have to forget your instructions," said Nipper, deftly placing a pound note into the man's palm. "Your conscience needn't worry you; this is all for the good of the school."

The man was still doubtful.

"You might as well know that we're determined to go on," continued Nipper. "I'm a good driver, and I can handle this coach easily. Will you continue to drive us, and keep mum—or shall we put you in that barn with your late passengers? It's entirely up to you."

"I'll drive," said the man promptly.

As they started off, Handforth was yelling with laughter, and the other fellows, too, were vastly amused. But Nipper pulled them up short.

"It's no laughing matter, you chaps," he said, his voice charged with seriousness. "We're taking on a big responsibility."

"Playing against Brent?" said Handforth. "Why, we're going to have the time of our lives!"

"Remember this—we've got to play as we've never played before!" said Nipper. "We've not only got to play well, but we must win!"

"We'll do our best, of course——" began Gresham.

"We've got to do better than our best," insisted Nipper. "Cricket's an uncertain game, I know, but to-day

"must prove the exception to the rule—and there's got to be no uncertainty about our victory. Great Scott, don't you realise that if we're licked by Brent College we shall be humiliated in the most abject way? Forrest & Co. will score. We're taking their places because we consider they're no good. So we must be good!"

CHAPTER 17.

'At Brent College.

"FORREST'S the name—Bernard Forrest," said Nipper, smiling. "I'm captain."

"Pleased to meet you, Forrest," said Jevons, the Brent skipper, as he shook hands. "I got your letter yesterday."

"We're very pleased to have this game—and the weather looks like keeping fine," continued Nipper. "This man here is Gore-Pearce—and here's Hubbard."

Nipper introduced them. The fellow he introduced as Gore-Pearce was Handforth—and "Hubbard" was Reggie Pitt. Every member of the Rebel XI had taken on the name of one of Forrest's XI. On the journey Nipper had dinned it into their heads to remember their new names. Handforth, at first, had jibbed at the idea of becoming Gore-Pearce, but it couldn't be helped. And it was all for the honour of St. Frank's.

There was every chance that the daring substitution would succeed. Nobody at Brent College knew them, so they were safe from recognition. The names they gave were accepted without question—and it was very necessary that they should use these names; for, of course, Forrest had sent the Brent captain a list of the St. Frank's team. Therefore, Jevons was in no way suspicious.

"So far, so good, you chaps," murmured Nipper, when they were in the dressing-room. "Ye gods and little fishes! It's working! But, oh, for goodness' sake, remember your new names! If the truth leaks out, and it gets to

the Head's ears, there'll be the dickens to pay!"

"The Head's a good sort——" began Handforth.

"Yes; but, dash it, this is different from playing a friendly," said Nipper. "We have all been strictly forbidden to play for the school; and here we are going out to play Brent—not as a mere Rebel Eleven, but under false colours."

"There's nothing dishonourable about it," said Reggie Pitt happily. "Isn't it worth a bit of risk to make sure of a St. Frank's win—and to dish those outsiders?"

Jevons had won the toss, and presently the St. Frank's cricketers went out on to the field. It was a glorious ground, delightfully green, and as smooth as velvet. The pavilion was handsome and commodious, and large numbers of Brent fellows were present. More than ever Nipper realised how necessary it had been to take this drastic step. For Brent College was greater school than St. Frank's—not that Nipper really admitted this fact to himself. Yet it was so.

Travers opened the bowling, and so deadily was he that he bagged a wicket with the sixth ball of the over—a beautiful, clean ball, which whipped the middle stump right out of the ground.

It was a good beginning, and Travers had never felt happier. He, in particular, was revelling in the adventure. After all he had put up with from Forrest, it was joyous indeed to be getting some of his own back.

The Brent men settled down to first-class cricket, and there was no other excitement until Handforth brought off a glorious catch which more than made up for his mistake in the River House game. It seemed impossible that he could reach the ball in time; but with a superhuman effort he raced like a hare, leapt skywards, and his fingers just closed over the ball in the nick of time.

"Oh, well caught!"

Handforth was not the only St. Frank's fellow who was playing better than his best. They were all keyed up

to a fine pitch, and they had taken Nipper's talk to heart. They must win this game!

But Fate works in strange ways, and although the odds seemed all in favour of Nipper & Co. at the moment, events were moving, twelve miles off, which would make all the difference.

To be more exact, a bull was moving and moving rapidly.

It was the height of misfortune that the animal should fly into its tantrums on that particular afternoon. Two farm-hands had been instructed to take the bull out of the meadow, and the bull objected. Having charged at one man unsuccessfully, he dodged, burst through the hedge, and found himself in a new world. In short, he was in the meadow which contained the barn—and the barn contained Forrest & Co.

The bull took one look, and in his present awkward frame of mind, he decided that something needed investigating. De Valerie and two or three other fellows were standing by the barn door, and it was sheer ill-luck that their blazers were mainly red. The bull gave one great bellow, lowered his head, and charged.

"Great Scott!" gasped De Valerie. "The blighting thing's coming for us!"

In such an emergency there was only one thing to do—and the boys did it. They bolted. When an enraged bull is charging you, you can't very well waste any time. The juniors streaked for a hedge, leapt clean over it, and gained the safety of the road.

The bull, in the meantime, continued charging. Owing to the heat of the afternoon, one of the juniors had shed his blazer, and had hung it on a nail on the barn door. The bull, seeing it, gave a blind, mad charge.

Craaaaash!

Undoubtedly the bull got the worst of it. He went clean through the door, it is true, but he came such a cropper that he lay sprawling on the barn floor, and all the fight had gone out of him.

Yells of alarm sounded. Forrest &

Co., more by luck than anything else, had escaped. Hearing the shouts outside, and knowing that something was wrong, Forrest had applied his eye to the hinge crack. In the nick of time he saw the charging bull, and he yelled to his companions to stand back. Thus, at the critical moment, they were out of harm's way, although quite a number of splinters were scattered over them.

"Quick! It's our chance!" gasped Forrest. "All those fellows have gone. We can get out."

"But—but the bull!" burred Gulliver. "It might charge again!"

"Don't be a fool! It's knocked itself cold!" said Forrest. "Come on! Haven't you chaps got any sense? We'll never have a chance like this."

They streamed out, and a moment later they were dashing across the meadow, taking no notice of the shouts of the farmer's men.

"Jumping cats!" shouted Farman. "It's Forrest and his pals! I guess they've bolted!"

"Look! The bull charged through the door and broke it down," panted one of the other sentries. "Come on! They'll get away from us."

They went dashing into the meadow, and the farmer's men got another surprise. They had the impression that the whole countryside was full of racing schoolboys. But Forrest & Co. had gained a good lead, and Forrest, at least, had seen something which filled him with hope. Three meadows away there was the embankment of a railway—and if you follow a railway long enough you are certain to come upon a station.

"By gad! If we can only give them the slip!" said Forrest, as he ran. "We'll get to Brent and expose Nipper and his rotten gang as impostors!"

Luck was certainly with them. Reaching the railway embankment, they climbed up, and Forrest was overjoyed to see, less than half a mile down the line, a little wayside station. It wasn't really a station, but a "halt."

De Valerie and the other guards, attempting to cut off a corner in order

to lessen the distance between themselves and the fugitives, found trouble. They went plunging into a marshy bog which delayed them for a full minute.

It really was remarkable how circumstances conspired to help Forrest & Co. It was only by a sheer fluke that the bull had happened to charge at the barn door, thus scattering the sentries; it was another fluke that the pursuers had found the boggy marsh.

Then came the biggest fluke of all. As Forrest and his companions raced for the "halt," they saw, coming along the track, a train—or, at least, one of those modern rail coaches fitted with motor-power, which are taking the place of local trains for short rural runs. On this line there was a rail coach every hour, and Forrest & Co. were just in time to catch one. If they had been worthy fellows engaged upon a worthwhile mission, it is any odds that they would have arrived at the station midway between the hourly waits.

But being bent on a thoroughly nasty piece of work, they dashed on to the platform just in time to pile into the coach. No tickets were necessary, for the conductor within would supply them. A clang sounded, and the next moment the coach was away.

De Valerie, Goodwin, Farman and the others, arriving spent and breathless, found themselves on a deserted wooden platform, and the rail coach two hundred yards away and rapidly gathering speed.

"They've gone!" gasped De Valerie. "They've beaten us!"

"By gum!" said Dick Goodwin. "And I'll bet that train goes straight to Brent!"

Meanwhile, blissfully unconscious of the catastrophe, Nipper and his merry men were having the time of their lives.

Although they had not been denied cricket since the ban, there was something glorious in playing this game for St. Frank's. Although they flew false colours, they were, nevertheless, St. Frank's boys, and their object was worthy of the highest praise—since

they were determined to uphold the fair name of their school.

Jerry Dodd, in tiptop form, had been doing some deadly bowling. He took two wickets in one over, and he maintained such a consistent length that the batsmen took no chances with him.

But they were good, those Brent men. They piled up the runs handsomely, and their total had already passed the two hundred mark. Seven wickets were down, but the batsmen now in play looked like making an obstinate stand.

A tall, athletic figure came strolling leisurely towards the junior playing-field—a figure of fate, so to speak. For this newcomer—such is the cussedness of things—was Edgar Fenton himself!

Fenton, the captain of St. Frank's!

And his visit, remarkably enough, was unpremeditated. He had looked in on the off-chance, and there on the field were Nipper and his men—masquerading under the names of Forrest & Co.

"St. Frank's man, I see," observed a Brent senior, as he strolled towards the stranger.

"Yes; Fenton's my name."

"Put it there, Fenton," said the other. "I'm Jarvis. I've heard of you. Captain of cricket at St. Frank's, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Come to see what the small fry are doing?"

"I thought I'd give them a look."

"It'll be worth it," said Jarvis. "I've been watching them for ten minutes. You know how to train 'em at St. Frank's. Our juniors thought that you'd be easy meat; but your youngsters are giving us a great game."

"Glad to hear it," said Fenton, concealing his astonishment.

He was, indeed, relieved. As there was no Senior XI match on this afternoon he had gone out for a quiet run on his motor-cycle; and during that run he had been thinking of Forrest's comic team. Finding himself only ten miles from Brent, he had changed his direction, and had ridden to the great school. He thought there would be no harm in

looking in to see how the new Junior XI was faring. He had fully expected to hear the worst.

Like a good school captain, Fenton had the interests of the school cricket at heart; even the Junior matches were his active concern.

He had remembered, too, that Brent College had arranged fixtures with the Seniors, and it had occurred to him that if Forrest & Co. made a hash of things, as they were practically certain to, the Brent seniors might not be so keen. For a certain amount of odium would reflect on the First XI if the juniors—as belonging to the same school—put up a pitifully weak show.

"Hallo! Another wicket down," said Jarvis, as they strolled nearer to the pavilion. "Did you see that catch? Never saw a ball held more beautifully. That's nine wickets down. Last man in. I was hoping our Juniors would get the total up to 250, but they won't do it now."

Fenton was frowning at the field, which had just come in view. He saw all the white figures; he noticed the tenseness, the alertness, of their attitudes. These boys were cricketers to their finger-tips. He tried to pick out Forrest, but failed. The sun was rather glaring.

"That youngster who's bowling is dangerous," said the Brent senior. "There he goes—Jove, what a perfect swing he's got! Zing! That was a stinger!"

"Yes," said Fenton, in a startled voice.

At that moment his gaze had rested on a fieldsman near at hand, and he had some difficulty in preventing himself from jumping. The fieldsman was no less a person than Edward Oswald Handforth! Then, like lightning, Fenton recognised Nipper and Travers and Tregellis-West and Gresham. It was incredible! These cricketers were all wrong! They were the original members of the St. Frank's XI—the boys who had been banned from playing in any school game!

"Just a minute, Jarvis!" said Fenton grimly. "Do you happen to know——"

"Look at that!" exclaimed Jarvis tensely. "Gad, what a bowler that youngster Hubbard is! That ball's got him; our man fell for it like an absolute novice. There goes the leather—right into the hands of——"

"What name did you say?" interrupted Fenton, staring.

"Oh, well caught!" yelled Jarvis, who was a cricket enthusiast. "Eh? Hubbard's the name, isn't it? I may be wrong. This other chap with the mop of hair and the rugged face—he's good, too."

"Do you know his name?" asked Fenton.

"Don't you? It's Pearce, or something," said Jarvis in surprise. "Yes, Gore-Pearce. That's the name. So our youngsters made 212. Not so bad!"

But Fenton was not listening. Hubbard and Gore-Pearce were known to him by totally different names. Fenton was shrewd enough, and it only took him about twenty seconds to grasp the full significance of what he had seen.

So Nipper and his rebels had dared to do this! In defiance of the headmaster's ban, they had somehow side-tracked Forrest & Co., and were impersonating them! The Senior captain's jaw set squarely.

He realised that he could not have arrived at a better moment, for the St. Frank's fellows were now streaming off the field at the close of the innings. Fenton stepped forward so that the cricketers would be compelled to pass him.

"We've got all our work cut out, Travers," Nipper was saying. "You and I will go out to bat first, I think——"

"I wonder if it will get beyond the thinking stage?" asked Travers, with a queer note in his voice. "Well, well! Do you see who's here?"

"Eh? What on earth—— Oh, crumbs!" gasped Nipper. "Fenton!"

"What?" yelled Handforth, who was just behind. "Oh, my only aunt! We're for it!"

CHAPTER 18.

Nipped in the Bud!

EDGAR FENTON'S face broke into a smile as he advanced to meet the cricketers.

"Well played, Hubbard!" he said, clapping Reggie Pitt on the back, looking straight into his eye, and speaking deliberately. "You've been bowling some first-class stuff."

"I—I—I——" began Reggie, and stopped.

"Your team's in good shape, Forrest," continued Fenton, smiling at Nipper. "I hope you'll do well in your own innings. I understand you made a great catch, Gore-Pearce," he added, glancing at Handforth. "Rather sorry I wasn't here to see it."

Handforth could only gape.

But Nipper, quick as a flash, twigg'd. The look he gave Edgar Fenton was full of gratitude and appreciation and relief.

"Glad you've come, Fenton," he said easily. "As you know, this is our first official fixture against Brent College, and we want St. Frank's to come out well. We'll do our best to win."

"That's the spirit," said Fenton. "I should say you've had the good name of our school in your minds ever since you left St. Frank's."

It was a remark with a double meaning, and Nipper understood them both. It told him, without any questioning, that Fenton was fully aware of the whole deception; and, like the good fellow he was, he was keeping up the fiction.

A little later, when the Brent team went out into the field, Fenton managed to get a private word with Nipper and Travers just as they were going out to open the batting.

"I suppose you know this might be serious?" he asked in a low voice.

"We entered into it with our eyes open," replied Nipper.

"Well, I'm saying nothing—now," said Fenton. "I'm not a spoil-sport. Have your game—and win. That's the main thing. Whatever happens when

we get back, there's no reason why these Brent men should know of your trick."

"We had to use the other team's names," murmured Nipper. "Forrest had sent on the list——"

"I understand that. Where is Forrest by the way?"

"We've got him locked up in a barn about twelve miles away," chuckled Travers. "No need for you to worry Fenton. We've got all the rest of it planned out. Why should Forrest grumble? He'll get all the credit for this win—if we do win!"

"No 'if' about it," said Nipper. "We're going to win! Come on!"

They went out to bat, and never in his life had Nipper been more determined. His confidence was supreme, and he needed no time at all to settle down. He sent the first ball away cleanly, and 2 runs were scored. The next ball went to the boundary, and the Brent fellows needed no telling that they were up against a master batsman.

Fenton watched with mingled feelings. He had decided that he must avoid a "scene" at all costs. But he was very dubious regarding the outcome of this rash adventure. He was not quite sure of his own position. As head prefect of St. Frank's, it was plainly his duty to make a report; then, on the other hand, he remembered that there is an exception to every rule. Only a few days ago the headmaster himself had been deliberately and blatantly blind. If the Head could be blind, then why could not Fenton be similarly afflicted?

It was a nice point, and Fenton gave it full and careful consideration.

"Here we are!" said Bernard Forrest, his voice charged with vindictiveness.

Brent was a quiet, sleepy Kent village, and from the little railway station the imposing greystone buildings of the College stood out on a hillside, half a mile away.

Peace reigned supreme; the summer's afternoon was hot, and the sun blazed down from a cloudless sky. The air was full of fluttering butterflies, humming bees, and countless smaller fry.

"Think we'll get there in time to have a game?" asked Gulliver as they hurried along the hot road.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Forrest who was in an evil temper. "There'll be no game for us—but I'll jolly well see that the other game is mucked up!"

"But how can you do that?" asked Hubbard. "The game's well on the way now, and they won't stop playing just because you tell them to."

"You fellows have no more sense than mice!" said Forrest contemptuously. "Do you think Nipper and his pals could come here and steal our game openly? They are impersonating us—using our names. All the Brent chaps are strangers to us, and so Nipper wangled the thing without any trouble."

"Gad," said Gulliver, "that's a bit thick!"

"But wait until we get there!" continued Forrest. "I'm going to march you straight on to the field and stop the game! Then I'll expose the impostors, and demand a replay. If we don't get it to-day, we'll fix it for next week."

"The Brent men might object," said Marriott.

"They can't object," said Forrest. "This match was fixed between St. Frank's and Brent. Nipper and his men are playing under false pretences. They don't represent the school at all. We've got them in a trap, and the headmaster of Brent is certain to report to Kingswood. Wait until those rotters get back to St. Frank's! They've flouted Kingswood, and there'll be the decency of a price to pay!"

"It looks like being a happy afternoon after all," grinned Bell. "My only hat! Wait until Nipper's gang see us crowding on the field!"

Fenton at this moment was watching the batting, and he was fascinated. Nipper was excelling himself. His handling of the willow was masterly; he was driving the balls, and cutting them with impunity. Boundary after boundary he scored, and no matter how the Brent skipper changed the bowling, it made no difference.

Travers, too, was putting up a glorious show. As he batted, he kept thinking of the sweetness of this revenge. For weeks Forrest had persecuted him; now Forrest was locked up in a barn, and there was no possibility of this glorious game being interrupted.

So, care free, Travers kept Nipper company in that magnificent opening "knock."

"Never seen juniors playing like it," said Jarvis in wonder as he joined Fenton. "You might think they were Sutcliffe and Hammond, batting for England!"

"We play good cricket at St. Frank's," smiled Fenton.

"You're telling me!" said Jarvis. "This junior skipper of yours—Forrest, isn't it?—is a jolly hot number! He looks set for a century."

A minute later Travers was out. Swinging hard at a ball, he just failed to catch it with the full face of his bat, and it soared straight up. The man at extra cover made no mistake.

A round of generous applause went up as Travers came out, and before he reached the pavilion Handforth passed him. Handforth was always eager to get to the crease. He did not believe in men who strolled out to the wicket as though they had the whole afternoon before them.

"Some more of your St. Frank's men coming along, I fancy," said Jarvis. "I hear that about a dozen juniors have just arrived."

Fenton started.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "I didn't expect any of our fellows to-day."

He thought of what Nipper had told

him—of Forrest & Co. being imprisoned in a barn. Abruptly he walked away, and he had hardly passed to the back of the pavilion before he saw Forrest & Co. striding towards the field, with grim faces.

Fenton did some quick thinking. Glancing round, he saw that none of the Brent boys were anywhere near by. Forrest and his men, apparently, had come straight in the main gate, had crossed the quadrangle, and had then made for the playing-fields. If, by chance, they had not yet spoken to anybody—

"Just a minute, you fellows!" said Fenton.

He was in amongst them before they realised his identity, for they had not expected to find a St. Frank's senior here. Then, all at once, they started shouting.

"Gad! You've seen, then?" asked Forrest breathlessly. "What are you going to do about it, Fenton?"

"Can't you keep quiet?" demanded Fenton sharply. "Have you seen anybody since you came in the gates? Have you spoken to anybody about—"

"We haven't seen a soul," put in Marriott. "We came straight here. We're going on the field, and we're going to muck up the game! We'll show Nipper that he can't fool about—"

"Hold on," said Fenton, with relief. "So you've told nobody the truth? That's good!"

"What do you mean—good?" asked Forrest, staring.

"I mean that you're going to keep your mouths shut!" retorted Fenton curtly.

They all stared at him, almost stupidly.

"Kee-keep our mouths shut?" stuttered Forrest. "But you don't understand! They're using our names!"

"I understand everything," said Fenton. "They may be using your names, but you're getting credit for cricket you've never played, and never could play. Can't you understand that,

you young idiots? If you keep quiet, you'll be able to return to St. Frank's like conquering heroes."

"But that's all rot!" protested Forrest. "This is our game—not theirs! Do you think I'm going to stand for this crookedness?"

"I didn't know you were such a stickler for the straight and narrow," said Fenton caustically. "You've changed, Forrest, haven't you? Anyhow, I'm not going to let you make a scandalous scene here! That River House affair was bad enough. I'll see that it's not repeated at Brent! So you'll just turn about and clear off!"

"Well, you're a fine school captain!" exclaimed Forrest, with a sneer. "Here are these chaps defying the Head, disobeying him, impersonating us, and you're making yourself a party to it all."

"You can't annoy me, Forrest, with your sneers," replied Fenton quietly. "Do you think I would make myself a party to this if there was anything dishonourable in it? Nipper and his friends came here with the finest intentions in the world—to play a good game—to uphold the fine cricket traditions of St. Frank's. They're doing it—and it doesn't matter a tinker's cuss to me whether they're using their own names or yours. This is the very first match which St. Frank's has played against Brent, and I'm not going to have you vindictive young sweeps barge in and jeopardise all future fixtures. Understand that?"

"You'll get into trouble for this!" snarled Forrest.

"I can look after myself," retorted Fenton. "I should advise you not to be cheeky, young fellow! I'm head prefect of St. Frank's, and I'm using my authority to order you to keep quiet. Say one word, and you'll have to answer to me!"

Bernard Forrest breathed hard, and then with set lips he turned on his heels. He and his chagrined team took their departure.

CHAPTER 19.

The Irony of Fate!

THE match was a personal triumph for Nipper—alias Bernard Forrest. His innings was such a joy to watch that Brent seniors came flocking to the Junior ground. Handforth, too, created quite a diversion. With Nipper batting at one end, Handforth was at the other, and Handforth, like the rest of the team, was to-day inspired.

He slogged with more than usual recklessness; he had narrow escape after narrow escape, but his proverbial luck held good. He sent the Brent juniors leather-hunting in all directions. In one over alone he knocked three fours and two sixes—and this off Brent's best bowler!

Handforth's 50 went up in next to no time, and he was out at last—as usual, caught—when he had added 61 to the total.

Reggie Pitt came out, and the game was as good as over. Nipper went right on to make a splendid century, and at last the match was over, "Forrest & Co." had won a glorious victory.

"Well, I'll admit you've given us a surprise, you chaps," said Jevons, the Brent skipper. "Good luck to you! You're a bit of a spoofer, Forrest."

"In what way?" asked Nipper.

"Didn't you tell me in your letter that you'd only just been elected skipper, and that you hadn't got your men into shipshape?" grinned Jevons. "What was the idea? I was expecting that we'd wipe you up."

"I wasn't myself when I wrote that letter," replied Nipper blandly. And the other members of the team chuckled. Jevons failed to see the joke, which was not surprising.

Fenton, by this time, had discreetly retired, though he had found time to have a word with Nipper, and mentioned the arrival of Forrest & Co. He had set off for St. Frank's on his motor-bike. He wanted to be there well in advance—just in case there was trouble brewing. As a human being Fenton was mightily proud of the Rebel

cricketers, but as captain of St. Frank's he was in some doubt as to the ethics of this situation.

When he entered the St. Frank's triangle he happened to meet William Napoleon Browne and Stevens of the Fifth. Quite a few Fourth Formers and fags were nearby, too.

"While I was out I looked in on the Junior match at Brent," said Fenton casually in talking with Browne.

"Then it is strange, Brother Fenton, that you are not haggard of face," said Browne. "Surely that match gave you a pain?"

Fenton laughed.

"Haven't you heard?" he said. "The Junior Eleven won by six or seven wickets. The captain made 108, not out."

Browne reeled.

"Knowing you as I do, brother, I can not doubt your word, but this information overwhelms me," he said. "Are you telling me that Forrest made a century against Brent?"

"Didn't you hear me the first time?" asked Fenton. "Gore-Pearce, too, made 60 off his own bat."

This time Browne fainted limply into Stevens' arms.

"Water!" he said feebly. "You can, with my permission, put something strong in the water if you like."

Fenton went on his way satisfied. Already the triangle was buzzing with the strange news. Forrest a century—Gore-Pearce 60! Brent College beaten by six or seven wickets!

Nipper & Co. on their return journey did not get far away from Brent before the motor-coach was stopped by Forrest and his team. The victorious juniors were somewhat surprised to find that Forrest was almost genial.

"So you pulled it off?" he asked.

"Yes, and there's no reason why anybody should know," replied Nipper. "Here's your coach, and you can pile into it. You'll return to St. Frank's as the victors—and get all the glory. That is, if you hold your tongues."

"We'll hold them," grinned Forrest.

"We had a little talk with Fenton, and we've been thinking things over. We don't mind stealing your thunder in the least. I don't think we could have done any better ourselves."

"Just one thing," said Nipper. "How did you get out of that barn?"

Forrest told him, and Nipper, who had been thinking hard things of De Valerie and the others, modified his views.

"Well, go ahead," he said. "We'll have to get the train and go back to that little 'halt.' Our bikes are there, anyhow."

The coach rolled off.

"So that's that," said Nipper. "Looks as though everything's all serene, you chaps. What a brick Fenton is!"

When the coach arrived at St. Frank's Forrest and his pals received a big surprise. Cheer after cheer rang out from crowds of Fourth Formers and others as the vehicle came to a halt just within the gates. Fellows came rushing up shouting, cheering, waving their hands.

"Well done, Forrest!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, the Eleven!"

The reception was all the more enthusiastic because St. Frank's had believed that Forrest & Co. would make a dreadful hash of the game. Truly, they returned as conquering heroes!

And while all this cheering was going on, Mr. James Kingswood had come to a momentous decision.

He had been thinking things over, and he was singularly pleased with the Rebels for their dogged spirit. Somebody had mentioned the Brent match to him, too, and he was anticipating that the new Eleven would return after an ignominious defeat.

"I think those boys deserve to be forgiven," murmured Fighting Jim. "After all, Dr. Hogge is now satisfied, and he's getting his new pupils, thanks to my intervention. I should be failing in my duties as a headmaster if I allowed the Junior cricket to go to rot. Nipper and his friends shall have their cricket freedom back."

But when he heard the news he had to reverse his views.

Forrest's Eleven apparently was made of the right stuff. Put to the test Forrest had come up to the scratch. It was only fair that such a fine cricketer should be allowed to continue. If the ban on the old Eleven was lifted, Nipper would again become captain, and there would be changes. Why should there be changes? Let this new blood carry on to further victories.

Thus, by thinking of their school first, the rebels had cooked their own goose. They were still outlawed; they were still rebels.

And Bernard Forrest and his pals were swanking about the school and brazenly accepting the credit which was not rightfully theirs.

CHAPTER 20.

England versus Australia.

FORREST found that it was very much to his advantage to keep quiet; and he warned his team to do the same. Why should they not bask in the sunshine of the school's generous praise? Those who were "in the know" dare not say anything for fear of getting into trouble. Fenton would not speak, because he had been a party to the deception.

"Well, it'll be all right when the next big match comes off," said Travers calmly. "It'll be a home match, and we can't play any tricks with it. Forrest and his men will come an awful cropper, and the Head will give them the boot."

"Will they come an awful cropper?" asked Nipper. "Our next home match is against Yexford, and you know, as well as I do, that the Yexford Junior Eleven is soft. Meanwhile, Forrest, knowing what is expected of him, will keep his men hard at practice until they are in something like form. It's possible that they'll lick Yexford."

"Crumbs!" said Handforth in dis-

may. "That'll give them a new lease of life."

"It would be a different thing if our next home match was against a hot side like Brent," said Gresham. "If a really brilliant team came here——"

"Wait—wait!" panted Nipper.

"Eh?"

"I've got the glimmering of the century's greatest wheeze!"

"Silence, children!" murmured Travers. "Go ahead, Nipper, let it glimmer—let it blaze into golden life!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Nipper, his eyes aglow. "Why not?"

"Why not what, ass?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"A Test match!"

"What!"

"Next week there's the real Test match—England versus Australia," continued Nipper. "Well, why not have a Test match of our own? Young England versus Young Australia!"

"By cripes!" said Jerry Dodd. "You—you mean——"

"You're the man!" went on Nipper, grabbing Jerry's arm. "You know lots of Australian coppers in other schools, don't you? Supposing you write to them and get up a representative Australian Eleven?"

"It's as good as done," said Jerry Dodd promptly.

"Then this Australian Eleven will send a challenge to Forrest & Co.—the team which scored such a brilliant success at Brent!" continued Nipper happily. "Forrest daren't refuse the match. It won't be easy meat like Yexford, and he and his pals will come the cropper of their lives."

"I don't quite get this," said Reggie Pitt, frowning. "What about the good name of the school? I suppose you realise that Forrest & Co., as representing Young England, will smother St. Frank's with ignominy?"

"Not St. Frank's, my son—just themselves," grinned Nipper. "I've got it all worked out now—to the last detail. This stunt is going to clear Forrest &

Co. out, and get us reinstated with full honours. You wait."

Three days later Bernard Forrest was startled, and even horrified, to receive a letter from an Australian boy named Benson, of Howell College, challenging the St. Frank's Junior XI to a minor test match. Benson declared that he had got up an Australian XI and St. Frank's was to represent England. If convenient the match could be played next week.

"By gad!" muttered Forrest, aghast. For he knew how hot the Australians were. Defeat was certain. Better write to this infernal Aussie and tell him that there was no vacant date.

"Busy?" asked a voice in the doorway.

It was Jerry Dodd, and he was holding a letter in his hand.

"I see you've heard from Benson, too," said Jerry sweetly.

"What!" gasped Forrest.

"Yes, he wrote to me by the same post," explained the Australian junior. "He wants me to play in his Australian team, you see. You'll fix the match, of course? You can't very well refuse after your great victory at Brent."

Forrest stared at him, knowing that he was in a trap. Impossible to write to Benson and refuse the challenge, for by this time the whole Junior School would know about it. Jerry Dodd would have seen to that.

"You grinning ape!" snarled Forrest. "I can't see anything to laugh at!"

Jerry Dodd roared, and went away. Within an hour the whole school was talking of the forthcoming match, for everybody took it for granted that Forrest would accept. How could he refuse? He, the century maker! Here was a golden opportunity to show his form in front of his schoolfellows!

So Forrest made the best of a bad job, and showed a bold front. He wrote by return, accepting—and the match was fixed. The unfortunate cads were committed to play as Young England!

"It ought to be a good game, Forrest," said Vivian Travers contentedly as he happened to meet the Junior captain on the Ancient House steps. "I shall just love to watch it. You'll have to score another of your centuries."

Forrest looked his venom.

"You'll laugh on the other side of your face before I've done with you!" he muttered. "By gad, I'm not through with you yet!"

He walked off, seething like a cauldron. Travers' smiling face irritated him beyond measure. He still held that weapon in his hand, and he vowed, then and there, that he would make use of it. But not in the way he had originally intended.

"Why so rude?" asked Travers, walking after him. "You ought to be very honoured. I hear that there'll be hosts of visitors for the great match."

"Can't you clear off?" snarled Forrest.

"Lots of fellows are inviting their people down," went on Travers. "My own pater is coming, as a matter of fact."

Forrest strode off without a word, for he could not trust himself to look at Travers. That last piece of information had inspired him. So Travers' father was coming down on the great day. Here was food for thought.

And Bernard Forrest thought hard—with ugly, malicious results.

CHAPTER 21.

All Serene.

UNTIL the Day arrived, the chief topic of conversation in the Junior School was the weather forecast.

But there was really no need to worry. At the moment England was the centre of a vast anti-cyclone, the barometer was high, and daily the wireless forecast was "fair and warm."

When at length the day of the match came, it proved to be cloudless, almost

windless, and blazingly hot. Ideal weather conditions, in fact, for such a great match.

Forrest, in desperation, had flogged his team until they were fed up with the whole confounded business. They were longing for the day when they would be able to resign. Cricket, they were finding, was half-brother to hard work. —But if they attempted to back out of this match they would earn the scorn of their schoolfellows.

Jerry Dodd was a great publicity man. Nipper had given him that job, and, as a result, not only a large number of friends of the Australian boys were coming, but parents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters of the Removites.

The Head himself, knowing of the match, and anxious to see the stalwarts who had shown such an astounding reversal of form, made it known that he would sit in the pavilion. Incidentally, it was Edgar Fenton—who had half an idea how things would go—who had put the idea into Mr. Kingswood's head.

Forrest went about, openly confident—but secretly dismayed. He had a feeling that this match was a deliberate "plant," and his venomous hatred of Vivian Travers increased. He blamed Travers for everything.

That morning he excused himself from the Form-room in the middle of morning lessons, and he went straight to the telephone and rang up a Guildford number. He knew a young fellow here at one of the banks.

"That you, Mortimer?" he said eagerly. "I want you to send a telegram to a fellow here named Travers—address it to 'Travers, Ancient House, St. Frank's,' and send it at about a quarter to two."

"What do I say in it?"

"Simply this: 'Come at once. Your father hurt in car crash. Guildford Hospital.' Got it?"

"Yes, I got it," came Mortimer's voice. "And I'll be hanged if I'll send it."

"But it's only a jape!"

"All right. In that case I'll send the wire," said Mortimer.

After dinner, things began to move.

Guests were arriving, and there was a general movement in the direction of Little Side. Forrest and his men, in immaculate white flannels, looked business-like enough, and some of the fellows, deceived by appearances, were prophesying that Forrest would pull it off. They were also deceived by that fiction of the Brent match. If Forrest's XI could do such things against Brent, they argued, why couldn't it lick the Australians?

"How long do you think they'll last?" asked Travers serenely as, in flannels, he strolled out towards the playing fields with Nipper and Jimmy Potts.

"Well, they might last half an hour—but I doubt it," replied Nipper. "These Aussies are mustard, and you've got to remember that Forrest & Co. will be as nervous as kittens."

"Master Travers!" called a voice.

Travers looked round, and found Tubbs, the pageboy, in the rear.

"Telegram for you, sir," said Tubbs.

"Dash it, that'll be from my pater," exclaimed Travers. "I hope it's not to say he's giving the match a miss."

He walked back and it was quite by chance apparently that Bernard Forrest was near at hand. Travers opened the wire, read it, and his face turned pale.

"Not bad news?" asked Forrest, with concern.

Travers looked at him with hard eyes.

"You'd be glad to hear it, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"Now, dash it, that's uncalled for," protested Forrest.

"It's from the Guildford Hospital—my pater's had an accident," said Travers. "I've got to get there—quick. Hospitals don't send messages like this unless— Do you know if there's a train?"

Forrest took the wire, read it, and gripped Travers' arm.

"I'm really awfully sorry," he said, with such deep concern that even

Travers, astute as he was, was deceived. "I don't profess to be too good, Travers, and we've had some unpleasantness in the past; but in a case like this— Well, hang it, I'm human! It looks bad, and if I can help you in any way I would, like a shot."

"Thanks," muttered Travers.

The shock of the news had robbed him, to a certain extent, of his customary calmness. Neither was he capable of thinking or reasoning. His one thought was to get away—to get to Guildford.

"There's no train till mid-afternoon," said Forrest quickly. "You might be able to hire a car. By gad, I'm playing cricket this afternoon, so you can borrow my motor-bike— No, you can't do that, either," he added abruptly. "You're forbidden—"

"Does that matter?" demanded Travers fiercely. "What do I care about bans? My pater might be dying! I've got to get to Guildford."

He dashed off without another word, and Forrest looked after him with glowering, triumphant eyes.

"Well, that's settled his hash!" he muttered malevolently.

On the very day that his father was coming down to St. Frank's he was careering about the countryside on a borrowed motor-cycle! Cunningly Forrest had retained possession of the telegram—as he had intended from the first. He had waited and watched for it to arrive, and had been on hand at the critical moment.

Easy enough to destroy the wire. The Guildford Hospital people would deny having sent it. Thus, when Travers spoke of that telegram as an excuse for his wild motor-cycling, there would be no corroboration.

Things had worked out very perfectly for Forrest, his one fear had been that other fellows would be present when Travers opened the wire. But, by sheer luck, Travers and Forrest had been alone.

Running hard, Vivian Travers reached the garage. He pushed

Forrest's splendid motor-cycle out, and a moment later he was in the saddle. The engine roared, and away went the anxious, anguished junior. And, recklessly as he had driven in the old days, he surpassed himself on this hot summer's afternoon. He took hair's-breadth chances, speeding madly—dashing, as he thought, to the bedside of his father, who might be dying.

The Australian team had arrived, and the youngsters proved to be healthy, strapping sportsmen, as keen as mustard on the game. When Forrest saw them his faint-heartedness increased, but he maintained his bold front.

"Pleased to meet you, Benson," he said as he shook hands. "Young Australia, eh? Well, Young England will give you a jolly good game."

"I hope so, clobber," grinned Benson. "Quite a crowd here, eh? Looks like a big occasion."

Little Side, in fact, was crowded; the pavilion had no empty seat. Irene Manners and a large number of other Moor View girls, hearing the sensational news, had come over in support.

They had heard a whisper or two of something else—for they did not look at all sorry to see Nipper and his merry men amongst the spectators.

The rival captains tossed, and Forrest won. He decided to bat first.

"I am very gratified, sir, to see you here," said Mr. Suncliffe, beaming upon the Head. "I feel that this is going to be a great game."

"If only the youngsters can reproduce their form of the Brent match it will be a great game," said the Head, smiling.

"Oh, but they are certain to do that—and probably go one better," said the Third Form master. "Why not? They have had more practice since, and they are keyed up to-day to do their very finest for England. Ah, I see that Forrest and Gore-Pearce are going out to open the batting. Splendid!"

A round of applause went up, and it was Forrest who opened. He had little faith in his side, knowing them all too well; but he was determined to show the spectators that he, at least, could play.

Alas for his intentions!

No doubt it was nervousness—a knowledge of the greatness of the occasion—but he lifted his bat to the very first delivery, and the ball whipped under it and removed his leg stump.

"Hozzat?"

Forrest gulped. He was out first ball. For a century maker he had not done so well!

"A pity," said the Head. "I'm afraid this is going to make the other batsmen nervous."

They were nervous, in any case. Hubbard came out next, and he was trembling so much that he could scarcely take guard. When the next ball came down he swiped at it wildly, caught it on the edge of his bat, and in a flash it was grabbed by the "keeper."

"Out!"

Something like consternation reigned now—but not amongst Nipper & Co. They had been expecting this. Perhaps they had not anticipated quite such a hopeless show, but they were by no means surprised.

"Marvellous!" murmured Handforth. "At this rate they'll be all out within half an hour."

"Then our chance will come," murmured Nipper. "I say, has anybody seen Travers? I believe he had a wire, but I haven't seen him since. It's a pity he's missing this."

Sensation followed sensation. Merrill, the next man in, managed to fumble with his bat and guard his wicket. Surprisingly enough, he struck out at the next ball, and it shot off. They scored two runs.

This was the position when the over was finished, and Gore-Pearce got the opposite bowling. By a pure fluke he

sent the first ball to the boundary—a wild, blind hit, of which he knew nothing.

With the next ball he was out—middle stump sagging.

By this time the spectators were looking hot and bothered. So this was Young England! Such a debacle had seldom been seen on Little Side.

Mr. Kingswood sat grim in his seat; and near him, poor little Mr. Sunchliffe was in an agony of despair. He had hoped for so much from this match.

The collapse was utter and deadly. The following batsmen, terrified by the fate of their predecessors, were in no condition to face the deadly bowling of the Australians. Nerves, with a capital "N," gripped them. Man after man registered nothing but a duck, and came out.

It became a joke. Before the third over was halfway through, Young England was completely dismissed. It had taken Young Australia just over a quarter of an hour, and the entire eleven was out for seven runs!

"Upon my word," said the Head, sitting up very straight.

He was thinking hard.

"This is terrible!" groaned Mr. Sunchliffe. "Appalling! Can this be the side which obtained such a good victory at Brent?"

"I wonder?" said Mr. Kingswood, with deep suspicion in his eyes.

There was no game, of course. Everybody was feeling uncomfortable. Forrest and his men went out into the field, since there was nothing else to be done. They were afraid to look at the spectators, and when the Australian innings started, the bowling was so erratic, so nervous, that the leather was sent to the boundary time and again.

It took Young Australia just two minutes to win the game, which made it a greater farce than ever. By now, gusts of laughter were passing round the field. The thing had become comic. The Australians did not know what to do, Forrest & Co. were helpless with

shame, and the crowd felt that they had been grossly swindled.

It was Nipper who saved the situation.

No sooner had the winning hit been scored than he ran out upon the field.

"I say, you Aussies!" he shouted loudly.

They gathered round.

"Awfully sorry that St. Frank's has given you such a rotten game," continued Nipper. "A proper farce, isn't it?"

"It seems more like a joke to me," said Benson.

"Well, it so happens that the original St. Frank's Junior XI is barred from playing on this field—headmaster's orders."

"Oh!"

"But we've got a ground of our own," said Nipper, knowing full well that Mr. Kingswood could hear every word. "What do you say to coming over and starting afresh? We'll give you a game—and I think we'll put up a performance quite as good as St. Frank's put up against Brent College."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled a large number of Removites.

Forrest writhed. And then, before Benson could either accept or refuse, Fighting Jim Kingswood himself stepped out of the pavilion, and came striding out upon the grass.

"Where were you, Nipper, on the afternoon of the Brent match?" he asked bluntly.

"Me, sir?" ejaculated Nipper, startled. "I—I was away."

"Playing cricket?"

"Yes, sir."

"What team was it you played against?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

"I'm not surprised to hear it," said Mr. Kingswood ominously.

Then, with a sudden change, he patted Nipper on the shoulder.

"I feel that you and the other members of your team have been banned for long enough," he went on. "The

restrictions are lifted from this minute. I doubt if the Junior School will wish to retain the services of Forrest as captain, and as you were the old captain, I see no reason why you should not —"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Nipper, with full understanding

"And you can, if you like, start this England versus Australia match over again—here, on your own playing field," said the Head. "I came here to see some cricket, so far——"

His words were drowned in the storms of cheering which arose. And amid the general excitement, Bernard Forrest and his wretched team faded away, their one thought being to hide their diminished heads.

"It worked, my sons—it worked like a glorious dream!" gurgled Nipper, later, in the dressing-room.

He and Handforth hugged one another, and there were gleeful chirrups from the others.

"Do you mean to say that you figured on all this?" asked Gresham, eyeing Nipper with respectful admiration.

"Of course," grinned Nipper. "Wasn't it a foregone conclusion that Forrest's measly crowd should crack up? My wheeze was to expose them in front of a great crowd, and then ask the Aussies to play us on our own ground. I was hoping that the Head would lift the ban, but I hardly expected he would be so handsome about it. My sons, Fighting Jim is no fool, and it's a cert that he twigged."

This, indeed, was actually the case. Mr. Kingswood, thinking of that Brent match, guessed what had happened, but, being a discreet man, he made no inquiries. This was essentially a moment for golden silence.

Mr. Robert Travers arrived at St. Frank's just as the real match was beginning. There had been some consternation amongst the juniors because Vivian Travers was not to be found; but as Nipper won the toss, Travers' absence was not so disastrous. He was almost certain to turn up before he would be wanted to go out to bat.

Forrest, overwhelmed by the ignominy of his "showing up," was hanging about in the Triangle, waiting. At least, he told himself, he would have the satisfaction of getting Travers into trouble.

"Looking for your son, sir?" he asked, approaching Mr. Travers, as the latter got out of his car.

"It doesn't matter," said Mr. Travers, smiling. "I expect I'll find him on the cricket field."

"No, sir—he's out on my motor-bike."

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Travers. "Are you trying to joke with me, young man?"

"Great Scott! You don't mean to say, sir, that he's still forbidden to ride motor-bikes?" asked Forrest, in affected surprise. "Why, he told me—— I lent him my motor-bike, and he's gone for a long ride."

"Oh, indeed!" said Travers' father. "When he comes back I will have a word with him. So this is how he cheats me! I am much obliged to you, my boy, for telling me this."

"I hope he won't get into any trouble, sir——"

But Mr. Travers was striding off.

It was at that very moment that Travers himself was leaving the Guildford Hospital. He had learned, to his infinite relief, that his father had not been there—that there had been no accident—that the hospital authorities had sent no telegram.

"A hoax—a fake!" muttered Travers, his mood changing. "By Samson! And it was Forrest who lent me his motor-bike—my pater's going to be at St. Frank's to-day! Am I going soft, or nutty, or what? It was a deliberate plot of Forrest's to get me into trouble."

He remembered, then, that Forrest had kept the wire. There was the game, too—that great game in which he was to take his own part.

He dashed to the nearest telephone and rang up St. Frank's. A fag was fetched, and he rushed out to the cricket field. Pitt, informed, hastened to the 'phone.

"Yes, your pater's here, looking a

mad as a hatter," he said. "Where the dickens are you, Travers?"

"In Guildford."

"What!"

"I'll explain later—but it was a dirty trick of somebody's," said Travers. "How's the game going?"

"Badly—I'm out already—only scored ten," said Pitt wretchedly. "Nipper's going ahead well, but Gresham was out for a duck. If we get skittled out like Forrest & Co. we'll never be able to hold up our heads again."

"I'm coming," said Travers fiercely. "For goodness' sake keep things going until I arrive. I've got to have my knock."

If he had ridden hard before, he now rode like a madman. But he was such a skilful rider that he took chances without risk to life or limb. Meanwhile, Pitt had gone back to the field, and he found himself gripped by Mr. Travers.

"Have you seen my son?"

"I've just been talking to him, sir—he's in Guildford," said Pitt. "It seems that somebody played a trick on him, just to take him away from the game. Wild horses wouldn't have dragged him away this afternoon if it hadn't been something vital. Before he rang off he told me he'd had a telegram, saying that you had met with a serious accident, so he borrowed somebody's motor-bike to dash to your bedside. But it was all a fake."

"I see," said Mr. Travers, his eyes softening. "And now?"

"He's coming straight back—to help us in the game."

And even Reggie Pitt was startled when Travers arrived—for it seemed impossible that he could have ridden from Guildford in such a short time. In dusty flannels, Travers strapped the pads on, and went straight out—for he arrived at a critical moment, just after Handforth, having scored twenty-three, not out. Travers was rushed straight on to the field, and he had no opportunity, even, of having a word with his father.

The one thought which sang through

his brain was that he was in time. Forrest was foiled! And so happy was Travers that he played the game of his life. He batted like one possessed. Even after Nipper was out—after scoring seventy-three—Travers carried right on to the finish of the innings. He made a hundred and fourteen, not out, and the total of St. Frank's score was three hundred and eighty—a truly magnificent total against such brilliant players as the Young Australians.

"Fine, my boy—splendid!" exclaimed Mr. Travers, grasping his son's hand, as he came out. "I'm proud of you."

"But, dad—"

"Don't talk to me about motor-cycles," interrupted his father genially. "It was a motor-cycle which brought you back here in time to play this great innings. I'm not going to make any inquiries about that incident. We'll forget it, Vivian—and next week I'll send you down one of the latest machines."

"Oh, dad!" exclaimed Travers joyously. "Then—then everything's all right!"

He rushed away to tell Irene Manners the great news—for her danger was now over. Forrest could not harm him, neither could Forrest harm her. The affair was too old now—it was forgotten.

And Travers himself was too good-hearted a fellow to gloat over Forrest's despicable downfall. The fellow was beneath contempt. He wasn't even worth punching—as a punishment for his cowardly, despicable trick. After all, a fellow doesn't punch a worm because the unfortunate creature happens to be a worm.

As for the game, Young Australia batted well, but the St. Frank's Junior XI—back in its old place—played an inspired game, and Jerry Dodd and his fellow countrymen found it quite impossible to reach that magnificent total.

St. Frank's won handsomely, after the finest game ever seen on Little Side, and it was many a day before St. Frank's forgot that great and glorious occasion.

THE END.

OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

FIREWORKS AT LORD'S

C. H. Q.

LORD'S ground is the headquarters of English cricket. On this famous enclosure shared by the M.C.C. and Middlesex county clubs more famous matches have taken place than on any other ground. And the Test matches between England and Australia are always sure of an enthusiastic following.

No matter what the state of the rubber, or what has happened during the past series, the clashing of the two countries at Lord's is sure to produce an intense interest.

Yet England's record is not at all impressive. So far, fourteen Test matches have taken place at Lord's, of which the Home Country can claim four wins. Australia have won on five occasions, and the other five matches have been drawn. With one tremendous exception, the scores have ruled on the low side, with no great advantage to either side.

But the worst thing from the English point of view is that we have not won a game at Cricket's Headquarters since 1896—nearly forty years ago!

Still, winning is not everything at cricket, and there have been some wonderfully exciting games, even though tall scoring has not been much in evidence.

A Sensational Game.

One of the most sensational games on record was the match of 1888. Australia had first knock, and only compiled 116. This looked fairly promising for the Mother Country, but appearances were rather deceptive, for England were skittled out for 53.

However, there was still the second innings to come, and everyone thought England would make amends. The optimism of the home side increased when the England bowlers started getting a bit of their own back and got rid of their opponents for 60.

Only 124 runs were wanted by England, and it looked an easy thing when the opening batsmen started getting the runs. But a great change came over the game, and the whole eleven were sent back to the pavilion for 60 runs!

This was one of the shortest games ever played where all four innings were completed. It did not start till three o'clock on the first day, and it was all over before the time for drawing stumps on the second day!

Big Scores.

The total of 53 scored in this game ranks as the lowest ever made by England at Lord's. Oddly enough, this total was equalled by Australia in 1896 on the occasion of England's last win.

On only four occasions has the four-hundred mark been passed for the total of an innings. This was done twice by England and twice by Australia. Between 1899 and 1926 the score never rose beyond three hundred odd. Australia held the record for all these years with 421.

In this large total of 1899 Clem Hill and Victor Trumper, two of the best-known Australian cricketers ever to come here, each had splendid knocks of 135. Monty Noble, destined to skipper the side in future years, got 54.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

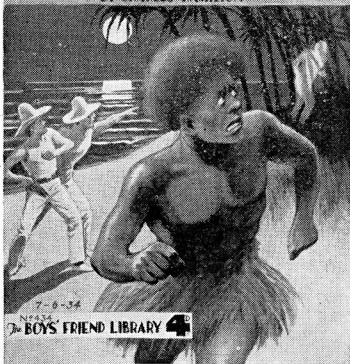
S.A.

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(Continued from page 96.)

It is noteworthy that such a tangle did the bowling get in that two men were put on who had scarcely sent down a ball in their lives. They were Ranji and Tom Hayward. Unfortunately for England, neither got a wicket.

In 1926 it was England's turn to break the record, and they put up the excellent score of 475 for the loss of only three wickets. Both Hobbs and Hendren got centuries, but the huge total was not enough to ensure victory.

Australia, who had amassed 383 in their first innings, went on to get 194 with half their wickets down in the second attempt, and so the game was left drawn.

Beating the Record.

Four years later, in 1930, England again topped the four hundred in the highest scoring game ever played at Lord's. She ran up the fine total of 425. Duleep Singh collected 173, Tate hit up a good 54, and Hendren just missed the half-century by two runs. It seemed a good score, and the spectators sat back and prepared to see England gain a victory.

But that did not quite happen. Woodfull, the Aussie skipper, took it into his head to score 155, opening the innings with Ponsford, who got 81. This knocked a bit of a hole in the English score. But more amazing things were to follow.

Don Bradman and Alan Kippax added a little matter of a some further three hundred to the total, and McCabe and Oldfield knocked up forty odd each.

By the time the crowd were getting used to it the innings was declared closed for six wickets, having amounted to 729, of which Don Bradman had made 254.

England went in again and collected the quite reasonable score of 375, of which Skipper Chapman had a splendid contribution of 121.

But that was no use in this match of colossal scoring. Australia wiped off the odd seventy runs needed for victory, and won by seven wickets.